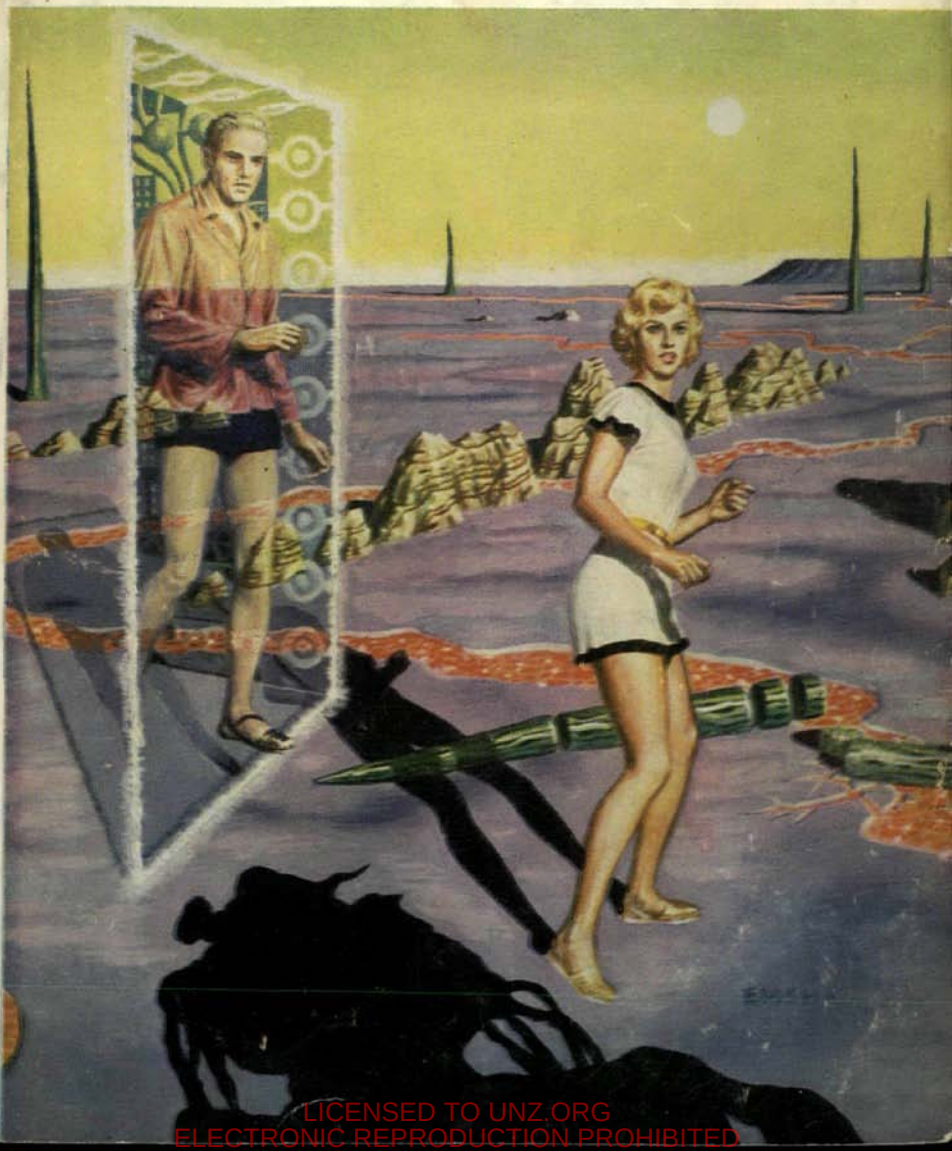
Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

MAY 1954

35¢

GRANNY WON'T KNIT
By Theodore Sturgeon



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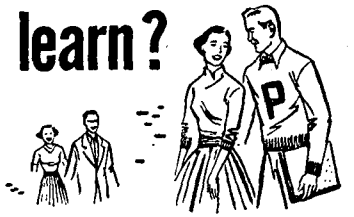

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MAY, 1954 VOL. 8, NO. 2

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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Ready, Aim—Extrapolate!

WORLD WAR II was the most remarkable war in history for two reasons:

- Even military analysts realized instantly that rockets, jets and nuclear weapons had smashed the old rules of strategy.
- They missed what may have been the most important innovation, which I'll get back to in a minute.

Some wars change the character of war, a fact that analysts usually miss until the next one, when they can trace back to the original causes. Von Moltke, for instance, dismissed the War Between the States as two armed mobs chasing each other over the countryside, from which nothing was to be learned. Yet that war introduced armored ships, land mines and defense in depth, among other novelties.

World War I adopted the defense in depth and froze it rigidly into war of position. Using its actuarial tables, Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart predicted—before WW II—that such modern defenses as the Maginot Line had made military assault unthinkable.

How could he have overlooked the importance of planes and tanks in breakthrough? In the same way his embarrassing analysis is being overlooked now, so that he remains an honored expert. But he was guilty of nothing more than von Moltke—missing the revolutionary nature of the change simply because it was revolutionary and therefore unpredictable.

Military analysts are having the same trouble with the weapons introduced in WW II. Unlike the waspish fighter planes, the slow bombers with their puny payloads and the lumbering blind tanks of WW I, these had no infancy to go through.

Or did they?

You and I can't answer, nor can the analysts. But even if they could, they'd be unaware of the point I said I would return to.

Science fiction became a military factor for the first time in history.

In America, it was studied sharply for new ideas. I don't know how many were combed out, or which ones, but certainly no reader was unfamiliar with them when they were put onstage.

In England, the same process went on, plus another funnier one: Writers were invited to submit their most fantastic notions, which were carefully blueprinted—and the nonsensical plans deliberately allowed to fall into enemy hands!

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And there, underscored with italics, is perhaps the great revolutionary fact of World War II. Not the bombs, which may be outlawed as was poison gas, or the rockets and jets, which can be countered, but the first military use of science fiction.

Where will it lead to? That's prediction and we're not in that business.

Where *can* it lead to? That's extrapolation, which *is* our business.

- Weapons, unquestionably — we've made a big contribution in this field and will go on doing so.
- Tactics—when novel weapons are brought forth, novel thinking, imagination and daring are needed, and those are working definitions of science fiction.
- Strategy—here is where science fiction could have far more impact than in the thinking up and putting to use of weapons.

As I've said before, our bombs are only bigger ballistae, our radar merely electronic armor and shields. If it comes to a shooting war, God forbid, science fiction will continue dreaming up such devices.

But its notions of psychological warfare and invasion *might* be more valuable. You've read many—most of them attributed to extraterrestrial invaders, but some quite applicable to us. The best ones, of course, succeed bloodlessly; we're no admirers of slaughter and the messing up of real estate. All good generals agree with that, but they can't break tradition without the ingenuity that science fiction can offer.

As an example, sending spies and saboteurs into potential enemy territory is old hat. So is the Roman principle of divide and rule—once you've started firing, it's almost impossible to do any dividing.

Instead, send in experts who can maddeningly hog the road, hold up queues while fishing for change or ration coupons, tie up buses by asking questions that need complicated answers, snarl phone service with endless bright, witless gabble, bring cops and firemen to rescue kittens caught in trees, immobilize banks by depositing sacks of coins that have to be counted or by breaking big bills into infuriating combinations of smaller bills and change, holding up subway trains for friends . . .

In other words, inflict our daily frustrations in exaggerated form on a potential enemy—and watch his society go edgy and begin to shake apart!

Science fiction prefers peace, but it can fight with devilish inventiveness when necessary.

And it's started to do so!

—H. L. GOLD

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granny

When primly starched boy met unprim and unstarched girl, it was revolt at first sight, for Granny didn't knit—she wove!

Illustrated by TONEY

FOR ROAN, there was a flicker of blackness, almost too brief to notice, and he had arrived at his destination. He stepped down from the transplat and took three preoccupied steps before he realized, shockingly, that he had not materialized in the offices of J. & D. Walsh at all, but in a small plat-court hung with heavy and barbarous drapes. There was a fresh and disturbing odor in the air, which was too warm.

He cast about him worriedly, hunting for the dialpost that would send him to his father's office. It was not where it should be, at the corner of the court. Petals! He was late and lateness meant trouble.

"Well-l-l?" drawled a half

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won't knit

By THEODORE STURGEON

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singing, half whispering voice.

Roan spun, hitting the side of his foot painfully on the corner of the transplat. It made him hop. He had never felt so excruciatingly foolish in his entire thirty years.

"I'm sorry," he spluttered. "I must have dialed the wrong number." He located the source of the voice — a door across from him was open at its top panel and, in the small space, was framed a face . . .

The face!

If you dream about faces, you dream about them *after* you meet them, not before! The thought blazed at him, made him blink, and he blinked again at the cloud of golden hair and the laughing green eyes.

". . . the wrong, you see," he concluded lamely, "number."

"Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't," she said, in tones which could have been scored on a musical staff. Her hand appeared, to press back the side of the golden cloud.

A bare hand.

TINGLING with shock at such wanton exposure, he looked away quickly. "I'll have to—uh—may I use your transplat?"

"It's better than walking," she said and smiled. "It's over there." A long bare arm appeared, carrying a pointing finger. The arm was retracted and there was a small fumbling at the door-latch. "I'll show you."

"*No!*" How could this creature forget that—that she wasn't decently covered? "I'll find it." He floundered against the drapes, fumbled along them, at last threw one away from the dial pedestal. With his back firmly toward her, he said, "I have no tokens with me."

"Do you *have* to go?"

"Yes!"

She laughed. "Well, either way, be my guest."

"Thanks," he managed. "I'll—uh—send—" he began to dial busily and carefully, to avoid another wrong number—"send it to when I as soon as good of you three *five*."

Averting his eyes, he stood on the transplat. She was still inside her cubicle, thank the powers. Then he remembered that he hadn't the slightest idea of the number he had mistakenly dialed; although it had stared him in the face on her dialpost, he had been too distraught to read it.

"Oh, I didn't get your number!" he said hoarsely, but the familiar flicker of total blackness had come and gone, and he was standing on the transplat inside the office of J. & D. Walsh, waving his hand stupidly at Corsonmay, the oldish receptionist with the youngish hair.

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"*My* number?" Corsonmay echoed. Appallingly, she giggled. "Why, Roan *Walsh,* I never!" Under the privacy hood, her hands flickered. As he passed her desk, she pressed upon him a slip of paper. "It's really a very easy one to remember," she simpered.

He wordlessly stepped to his door. It slid back. He entered and, while it was closing behind him hurled the paper violently at the disposal slot. "*Blossom!*" he cursed and slumped into his chair.

"Roan, step in here a moment!" snarled the grille above him.

"Yes, Private!" Roan gasped out.

He sat for a moment, drawing deep breaths as if the extra oxygen would somehow give him the right words to say. Then he rose and approached a side panel, which slid open for him. His father sat glowering at him. His father was dressed exactly as he was, exactly as Hallmay and Corsonmay and Walshmam and everyone else in the world was, except—but don't think about *her* now, whatever happens!

PRIVATE Walsh swung his glower, beard and all, across Roan, then slipped his gloved hands under the privacy hood and studied them thoughtfully. Though Roan could not see them, he knew they were held with the fingers decently together, as unlike living things as possible.

"I am not pleased," said Private Walsh.

What now? Roan wondered hopelessly.

"There is more to a business than making profits," said the bearded man. "There is more to this business than moving goods. It is not a large business, but an arch's key is not necessarily a large stone. The transportation platform—" he droned, using the device's formal name as if the service wore a mitred hat—"is the keystone of our entire culture, and this firm is the keystone of the transplat industry. Our responsibilities are great. *Your* responsibilities are great. A position such as yours requires certain intangibles over and above your ability to make out manifests. Integrity, boy, reliability—respect for privacy. And, above all, personal honor and decency."

Roan, having heard this many times before, wrenched his features into an expression of penitence.

"One of the first indications of a gentleman—and to be a good businessman, one must be a good man, and the best of good men is a gentleman—one of the first ways of detecting the presence of a gentleman in our midst, I say,

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is to ask oneself this question: 'Is he punctual?' " Private Walsh leaned so far forward that his beard audibly brushed the privacy hood. The sound made Roan's flesh creep. "You were late this morning!"

Roan had a hysterical impulse to blurt, "Well, you see, I stopped off at a girl's place on the way and had a chat with her while she waved her bare arm . . ." But even hysteria yielded to his conditioning. And then his mind began to work again.

"Private," he said sorrowfully, "I *was* late. I can explain—" he heard the intake of breath and raised his voice slightly—"but I cannot excuse and will not try." The breath slid out again. Roan stepped backward one step. "With your permission, then, Byepry."

"Bye nothing. What is this explanation?"

THIS had better be good, Roan told himself. He put his hand behind him. He knew this, with face downcast, added to his penitent appearance.

"I awoke this morning caught up with a great idea," he said. "I think I have found an *economy*."

"If you have," rumbled the beard, "it's been hiding from *me*."

"Each load of freight we transplat carries a man with it. This man does nothing but hold the manifest in his hand and look up the receiver's clerk at the arrival point. My plan is to eliminate that man."

"You awoke with this in mind?"

"Yes, Private," Roan lied, still marveling at his mental resourcefulness.

"And thinking about it delayed you?"

"Yes, Private."

"Since you were apparently fated to be late in any case," the old man said acidly, "you'd have done better to stay asleep. You would have wasted less of your time—and mine."

Roan knew enough to keep his mouth shut.

"In the history of matter transmission," said his father, "nine shipments have gone astray. The consequences are appalling. I shall assign you to read the history of these nine cases and memorize the figures. In one such case—the arrival of one hundred and twelve cubic meters of pig-iron in a private house measuring eighty-four meters — the results were spectacularly expensive."

"But that can't happen now!"

"No, it can't," admitted Private Walsh. "Not since the capacity-lock, which prevents the shipment of any volume to a smaller one. But there is still room for some gruesome possibilities, as

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in the Fathers of Leander case, when two hundred female assembly workers were sent, in error, into the monastery of this silent order. The damages—first degree violation of privacy, you know—were quadrupled for the particular aggravation and multiplied by the number of Fathers and novitiates. Eight hundred and fourteen, if I remember correctly, and I do.

"Now, the employment of a properly trained operator would have reduced the presence of these females in that building to a matter of tenths of a second and the damages accordingly. The shipment would have been returned to its source almost before it had arrived. As long as such things can occur, the wages paid these operators are cheap insurance indeed." He paused ironically. "Is there anything else you want to suggest?"

"If you please, Private," Roan said formally, "I am acquainted with these matters. My suggestion was this—that phone contact be made with the receiving party when the shipment is ready—that our bonded transplat operator dial seven of the eight digits necessary—and that the final impulse be activated at the receiving point by audio or video, or even by a separate beamed radio, which we could supply to our regular customers or deliver by messenger a few minutes before the main shipment."

IT got very quiet in the office.

"You see," said Roan, pressing his advantage, "if the final shipping orders come from the receiver himself, it is difficult to imagine how anyone else could possibly receive the load."

This silence was longer, and was ended by a sound from the beard precisely as if the old man had bitten into an olive pit. "You mentioned a messenger for the impulse-device. Where's your saving?"

"Most of our trade is with regular customers. Each of these could be given his own machine."

Silence.

Roan all but whispered, "An exclusive service of J. & D. Walsh."

"Well!" said Private Walsh. It was the most unreadable syllable Roan had ever heard. "This is not a suggestion, nor the consequence of anything specific which may or may not have happened; it is purely a request for a private opinion. Which strikes you as more—shall we say euphonious—J. & D. Walsh & Son, or J., D. & R. Walsh?"

Roan felt one of his fingernails bite through his glove as he clasped his hands behind him. He hoped his voice would not shake when he answered. "I could not

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presume to express an opinion on such a matter to one as familiar with . . ." and, beyond that, his voice would not go.

He flashed a glance at his father, and almost extraneously it occurred to him that if the old man ever smiled, he might not be able to see it at all through the beard. Chalk yet one more advantage up to the enviable state of being head of a family.

He thought for a moment that his father was about to say something pleasant, but the impossibility remained impossible, and the old man merely nodded at the door. "You're expected at my Mam's this evening," he said curtly. "Be prompt there, at least."

It stung, and the old man followed it up. "Lying abed immersed in company problems, even if they are of doubtful value, speaks well of an employee's devotion to his work. Unpunctuality speaks badly of it. A Private—" he squared his shoulders—"can be on time *and* be inspired."

Roan lowered his chin another notch and shuffled backward to the panel. It opened. He went through. When the panel clicked home, Roan leaped straight up in the air, his whole being filled with a silent shout. *The partnership! He's going to shake loose that gorgeous, beautiful, blossomy old partnership!* His gloved hands pounded silently and gleefully together. *Oh, Roan, you dog you, how do you do it? What makes that fuzzy head of yours tick when you get in a jam? Oh, you're a—*

He stopped, his mouth slack and his eyes abulge. There on his desk, in precisely the same pose, sat the golden-haired vision he had seen during the night and whose number he had dialed by error in the morning.

SHE was dressed—if one could call it dressed—in a long garment which fell from her throat and cascaded softly around her, rolling and folding and completely unlike the wrinkle-free, metrical cone-thrust-in-a-cone of conventional garb. Her arms were entirely bare and so, incredibly, were the feet which peeped out from under the flowing hem. She sat with both hands crossed on one knee and regarded him gravely. She smiled and was for a second transparent—and then she vanished.

Roan saw people and huge cargoes vanish every day—but not sixty meters from the nearest transplat! And not people indecently clad in outlandish fabrics which fell close to the body instead of standing properly away from it!

There was a heat in his face, and he became aware that he had

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not breathed in—how long? There was a straining ache about him and he realized that, at some point in this extraordinary experience, he had slumped to his knees on the carpet.

He got shakily to his feet and let himself be preoccupied with the reflex of adjusting his pantalets. They were neat and glossy and perfectly cylindrical, and not at all like the delicate pink taper of her—her limb. She'd had toes, too. Had it ever occurred to him before to wonder if women had toes? Surely not! Yet they had. *She had.*

Then reaction struck him and he staggered to his desk.

His first lucid thought was to wonder what this vision would look like properly clad and he found that he could not possibly imagine it. He found, further, that he did not want to imagine it, and he descended into a scalding shame at the discovery. Oh, cried every ounce of upbringing within him, the Private was right in withholding the partnership for so long; he'd be so wrong in trusting me with it! What am I, he sobbed silently, what horrible thing am I?

II

Private Whelan Quinn
Quinn and Glass,
Level 4,
Matrix 124-10-9783.

Honored Private:

In reference to yours of the seventeenth instant, we regret to inform you that the supply of chromium-plated ventilator girls is, at the moment, insufficient to complete the minimum mass for transplat shipment to you, which must total two toes. However, knowing that you use prefab paneling in considerable amounts, we are prepared to make up the weight in standard sheets if this is marriageable to you. We have the material in white, gold, dream and ivory. Please inform the undersigned as soon as possible if a doctor would be any help.

Yours in Privacy,

ROAN stared dully at the words which glowed on the voicewriter screen, his hand hovering over the SEND button of his telefax. He was wondering mistily whether that line about radiator grilles was quite right when the annunciator hummed.

"Yes?"

Corsonmay's giggly voice then emerged. "Greenbaum Grofast just called, Roan Walsh. Query on a 'fax transmitted at 1013 from your matrix. They want to know what is meant by item eleven on it."

"What's item eleven?"

"It says here, 'smiling toenails.' "

"Whatever it means, it's wrong. Is there a price on the item?"

"Just a blank."

"Then it doesn't matter. Tell them to cancel the line and upnumber the other items. You could have thought of that."

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"I'm sawrrree," she said in such a disgustingly ingratiating tone that, had she been in the room with him, he would certainly have bashed her head clear down to her bedroom—no, *backbone.*

"Listen," he snapped, "lift the copy of every 'fax I've sent out since I got here this morning and bring them in."

Roan growled. The shot of adrenalin his irritation yielded up cleared his mind and his vision, and he stared appalled at the letter on his screen. Shuddering, he cleared it. He could just see old Quinn puzzling out "*if this is marriageable to you.*" Further, he could see the deep, secret ripplings at the base of his father's beard if by any chance Quinn happened to check through to him.

Corsonmay minced in with a sheaf of copies. "This one says—"

"Give me those. Byemay," he rapped.

"Well, bye." At the panel, she stopped and said solicitously, "Roan Walsh, you look—I mean is there anything . . ."

"*Bye*may!" he roared.

She gulped. "You could tell *me.*" Then her eyes widened as she watched his face. That odd, detached part of himself which irrepressibly wondered about such things wondered now just what expression he was wearing. Whatever it was, it blew her out of the office as if the room were a cannon and she the shell.

He looked at the top sheet. '. . . *your question as to how many support poles in a lading ton. The clerk in charge will supply the information. What is her number anyway?*' Then there was another reference to gold, this time *with the light behind it,* and a fantastic paragraph about shipping a generator *complete with ankling bolts.*

Going through the sheets, the most recent first, he was relieved to see that his preoccupation had noticeably affected only the last four messages. He settled himself down to a grim and careful enunciation of the corrections, worded with apologies but without explanations, checked them carefully and sent them. Then he destroyed the copies he had corrected.

WHEN he straightened up, his face was flushed and his head spun. Noon already. Thank the powers for that.

Then he saw the note on his desk, at the corner on which the vision had appeared. In beautifully firm calligraphy was a transplat number—nothing more.

Hussy!

But he put it in his pocket.

On the way out, he said to Corsonmay, without looking at

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her, "Won't be back today. Field work."

"Oh, but you're not scheduled for—"

Before she could finish, he whirled and glared at her. She gulped so hard, he had the mad conviction that she was about to swallow her own lips. He strode to the dialpost, spun a number and got out of there.

He stood for a moment under the sky—well, under the metal-glas canopy—drinking in the sights of Grosvenor Center. There were shops and a restaurant and a library, and a theater as well, an immense structure honeycombed from top to bottom with its one-seat cells and one-man screens. Something called *The Glory of Stasis* was playing. He remembered the reviews—a two-hour prose poem dedicated to the fantasy of eternal afternoons, permanent roses and everlasting youthfulness. He should see it, he thought. After all, wasn't that what he needed—a reaffirmation in the permanence of things and his place in this eternal society?

How comforting the Center was! People moved from one shop to another, not hurrying, not idling, each as sure of where he was going as where he had come from. Each dressed alike, walked alike, the rectangular feet unhesitating, the tubular limbs alternating, the cone-in-cone clothing never rippling, never draping, never clinging close to bodies . . .

He shook himself.

. . . And concealed under the decent capes, stockinged hands were folded, unused until needed—just as Godmade as a bird's wing—and hidden when they worked, as all working mechanisms were housed. And as far as the eye could see them, these sane folk were identifiable, correct. One was never in doubt, for that smooth-faced one was a Bachelor like himself, and the long hair yonder was a May, and the bound hair a Mam, and the bearded ones were Privates.

Noble title, Private—constant reminder of the great principle of Privacy, which was the very essence of all order. It was born, he had been taught, of the people themselves when, in the days of the barbarities, they had formed great armies—millions upon millions of just people in a single organization—and their majority were called Private. Magnificent then and magnificent today.

HE saw the bank of transplats and felt a surge of pride. Someone had used the term "keystone." A good one. For the transplat covered the Earth like a great clean cape, standardizing language, dress, customs and ambitions. Every spot on Earth

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was but a step and a split-second away from every other, and all resources lay ready for the seeking glove. He had been curious enough, at one time, to attempt an orientation in geographic distances. He soon gave it up as profitless. What did it matter that the company offices were in Old New Mexico and his home near what had once been called Philadelphia? Could it be important that Corsonmay arrived each morning from Deutsch Polska and Hallmay, the Private's secretary, slept each night in Karachi?

The population was stabilized below its resources. Why, there was enough copper to supply power fuel for seven centuries—copper which, so they said, was once used to carry feeble little pulses of electricity. And when the copper was gone, it would be simple enough to synthesize more. Food—filthy, necessary, secret stuff—was no longer a problem. And for delicacies of mind and heart, there were the spaceships, roaring away to the stars and returning years later, carrying strange fossils and odd stones, after having traveled every laborious inch out and every inch back again, aging their crews and enriching the world.

Once, he knew, there had been talk of an interplanetary transplat, but it was now unshakably established that the effect was possible only in a gravitic field of planetary "viscosity." Once the immense task of establishing the dial central was finished, the system could be extended anywhere on a planet, but never between them. And a good thing, too, as his father had explained to him. What would happen to the beautifully balanced cultural structure if humanity were suddenly free to scatter through the Universe as it now scattered over the Earth? And why leave? What could there possibly be for anyone—except a crazy spaceman—off Earth?

He had read this, too: *A species which can build perfection as fast as we have done is a species capable of maintaining perfection forever.* It took fifteen thousand years to populate the Earth and then explode it in a mighty war. It took half a thousand years to concentrate the few hundred thousand survivors in Africa, the only continent left in which men could live. It took the African Colony six hundred years to reach the transplat stage in its technology. But *that* was only a hundred and fifty years back. The transplat built cities in days, floated them on impervious bedplates and shielded them with radiation-proof domes when necessary. People could settle anywhere — and they did. People

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could work the Earth for its resources almost anywhere — and they did.

ROAN sighed, feeling much better. He looked away from the calm but busy Center and idly took in what could be seen of the horizon. There a snow-capped mountain hung like a cloud, and yonder was blue water as far as the eye could see. He wondered what mountain it might be, what sea; and then he laughed. It was all the same to a man, all the same to humanity.

He paced out the Center, from one end to the other, delighted, proud. He was young and vital and marriageable — perhaps all such as he suffered from the equivalent of his blonde apparition when that time of life came upon them. Marriage, after all, held certain animal mysteries, and like those of his flower-shop, where he cleaned his body and teeth and stoked himself with food concentrates, they just could not be discussed. He would wait and see; when the time came, the mysteries would be explained, even as had all the others.

He came out into the walkway loving everybody, even, for a moment, Granny.

Granny! He stopped and closed his eyes, his face twisted. He'd very nearly forgotten about her. Well, she could blossom well wait. He'd had a bad time this morning and the very thought of Granny then had been unbearable. Who, in the throes of self-abasement, wanted contact with a veritable monolith of respectability? And who, having regained his respectability, needed the monolith? Either way, the visit was insupportable. He'd make his sister Valerie go. Someone from the family had to make the visit once a week. Why, he didn't know and had never asked. Let Valerie do it. What was the use of having a sister if you couldn't get her to do the dirty work once in a while?

He crossed the walkway, went to the phone banks and dialed Valerie's number after a glance at his watch. She should be back at work from noonrest by now.

She was. As soon as she saw his face, she said, "Roan Walsh, if you're calling up to palm that visit to Granny off on *me,* you have another think coming. I do my duty by the family and I'm blessed if I can see why I should do any more than my duty or why you should do any less so don't even say a word about it." He opened his mouth, but before anything came out of it, she said, "And don't be late either. And especially, don't be early."

Roan opened his mouth again, but the screen went black.

Out in the filtered sunlight

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again, he let the chagrin fade and the amusement grow. It grew into something rare in Roan—an increasing glow of heady resentment and conscious command. How did these magnificent human beings get so magnificent in the first place? Why, by asking if everything was all right or if it weren't—and, if it weren't, then they changed things until it was. Now everything was all right with him, except this Granny business. They ask the question—why should he go see Granny? Because someone always had to. That was no answer. Put it another way, then — what would happen if he just didn't go?

HE strode buoyantly down the walkway, beaming fiercely at the passersby, and the wonderful thought defeated him in exactly seven minutes, twenty seconds. Because the answer to 'What if he just didn't go?' was:

From Mam, that hurt look and then an avalanche of "understanding."

From Val, a silent, holier-than-thou waspishness, day after day.

And from the Private, thunder and lightning. And no partnership. Well, buds with the partnership!

At this point, he stopped walking. What did you do when you walked out on your family's business?

He'd never known anyone who had. Where did you go? What did you do?

His other, inner self said, banteringly, *Aw, come off it. Are you going to kick over the Cosmos to save yourself sixty minutes with the old woman?*

Roan said nothing to that. So the voice added, *What have you got against Granny, anyway?*

"She bothers me," Roan said aloud. He turned and went into a decorator.

What for? demanded the inner Roan.

"To buy something for Granny," he replied. And the inner voice, damn its stinking stamens, chuckled and said, *Know what, Roan? You're a crawling coward.*

"Why can't you be on my side for once?" he demanded, but its only answer was a snigger so smug that even his sister Valerie might have envied it.

The decorator was an old bachelor with a fierce countenance. Roan bought roses and hybrid jonquils, paid for them and started out. Suddenly he went back, prodded by his weird questioning mood, and said, "What did they call a place where you buy roses before they called it a decorator?"

The man uttered a soprano nickering which, Roan deduced, was laughter. He leaned across the counter and, looking over

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each of his shoulders in turn, said in a shrill whisper, "Flower shop." He clung to the counter and twisted up his face until the tears spurted.

Roan waited patiently until the man calmed down and then asked, "Well, then, why do they call the you-know-what a flower shop?"

This seemed to sober the man. He scratched his pale, cropped head. "I don't know. I guess because, whatever they called it before, people used to make jokes and cuss-words about it. Like now with—with Flower Shops."

Roan shuddered. Its motivation was beyond definition for him, but with it came a feeling of having taken a ludicrous path to a great truth, and somehow he knew he would never joke or swear about flower shops again. Or, for that matter, about whatever new name they gave the plumbing after they got through with muddying up this one. For this much he could say aloud, "There ought to be something else to curse and make jokes about."

THE man's fierce face yielded for a moment to puzzlement, and then he shrugged. To Roan, it was a disgusting gesture and an alarming one, the one his father had made years ago, when Roan's tongue was a little more firmly attached to his curiosity than it had been of late. It was transplat this and transplat that, until he had suddenly asked his father how the thing worked. The Private had stopped dead, hesitated, then shrugged just that way. It was a gesture which said, "That's how thing are, that's all."

On the way to the transplats, Roan stopped where people clustered. There was a shop there dealing in, according to its sign, FAD AND FASHION. Having passed through a number of engrossing fads in his life—Whirlstick and Chase and Warp and, once, a little hand loom on which he had woven a completely useless strip of material twice his length and two fingers wide—he stopped to see what people were buying.

It was a motion-picture of white-gloved hands manipulating two thick needles and a sort of soft heavy thread. No one would have dared to do such a thing in the open, but the picture was acceptable, though giggle-making.

On a shelf at waist height were many samples of the fabric which seemed to be the product of this exercise. He stepped forward until his cape covered enough of the shelf for him to pick up a piece of the material.

It was loosely woven, with a paradoxical texture, very rough, yet very soft.

It fell on and around his hand

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and draped away like—like . . .

"What is it? What's this called?" he blurted.

A woman next to him said, "They call it knitting."

III

HE skipped to the laFarge yards and Kimberley, Danbury Marble and Krasniak, checking inventories and consulting accountants. He did it all without notes, which he had left in his office when he charged out at noon. He did it efficiently and he did it, without at first knowing why or even how, in the most superb cross-spoor fashion, so that, by quitting time, it would take far more trouble than it was worth for the office to discover he had used the first two hours of the afternoon for his own purposes.

This small dishonesty troubled him more than a little. Honor was part of the decency-privacy-perfection complex, and yet, to a degree, it seemed to be on the side of good business and high efficiency to operate without it. Did this mean that he was not and could not be what his father called a gentleman? If not, how much did it matter?

He decided it didn't matter, cursed silently and jovially at the inner voice which sneered at him, and went to see his grandmother.

There was very little difference between one transplat court and another. A business might have a receptionist and homes might have a larger or smaller facility, but with the notable exception of the blonde's apartment in his dream—surely it *was* a dream—when he first found walls covered with drapes, he had never noticed much difference between courts.

Granny's, however, always gave him a special feeling of awe. If it could be found anywhere on Earth, here, right here in this court, was the sum and symbol of their entire culture — neat, decent, *correct*.

He stepped off the transplat and went to the dialpost to check the time, and was pleased. He could hardly have been any more punctual.

There was a soft sound and a panel stood open. It was the same one as always and he wondered, as he had many times before, about the other rooms in Granny's house. He would not have been surprised if they all proved to be empty. What could she need but her rectitude, her solitude and a single room?

He entered and stood reverently. Granny, all ivory and white wax, made a slight motion with her hooded eyes and he sat opposite her. Between them was a low, bare table.

"Great Mam," he said formal-

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ly, "good Stasis to you."

"Hi," she said quaintly. "How you doing, boy?" For all his patient irritation with Granny, as always he felt the charm of her precise, archaic speech. Her voice was loud enough, clear enough, but always had the quality of a distant wind. "You look like you hoed a hard row."

ROAN understood, but only because of many years of experience to her odd phrasing. "It's not too bad. Business."

"Tell me about it." The old woman lived in some hazy, silent world of her own, separated incalculably in time and space from the here and now, and yet she never failed to ask this question.

He said, "Just the usual . . . I've brought you something." From the pocket under his cape, he took the decorations he had bought, twisted the tube which confined them and handed the explosion of roses and daffodils to her. The other package clattered to the table.

There was the demure flash of a snowy glove and she had the stems. She put her face down into the fragrant mass and he heard her breath whisper. "That was very kind," she said. "And what's this?" She popped the wrapping and peeped down between the edge of the table and the hem of her cape to see. "*Knitting!* I didn't know anyone remembered knitting. Used to be just the thing for the old folk, when I was a sprout like you. Sit in the Sun and rock and knit, waiting for the end."

"I thought you'd like it." He caught the slight movement of her shoulders and heard the snap of the wrappings as she closed the package again and slid it to the undershelf.

They beamed at each other and she asked him, "Aren't you working too hard? You look—well, you were going to tell me about the business."

He said, "It's about the same. Oh, I had an idea this morning and told the Private about it. I think he's going to use it. He was pleased. He talked about the partnership."

"That's fine, boy. What was the idea?"

She wouldn't understand. But he told her anyway, choosing his words carefully, about his plan to eliminate the transplat operators. She nodded gravely as he spoke, and at one point he had a mad impulse to start making up nonsense technological terms out of his head, just to see if she'd keep nodding. She would; it was all the same to her. She was just being polite.

He restrained himself and concluded, "So, if it works out, it

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will be a real economy. There just wouldn't be any way for a shipment to go astray the way—" he almost blurted out the story of the arrival of the passenger van at the monastery, and caught himself just in time; the old lady would have been shocked to death —"the way some have in the past."

"I reckon they couldn't," she agreed, nodding as if she understood.

HE ought to return her courtesy, he thought, and said, "And what has occupied you, Great Mam?"

"I do wish you'd keep calling me Granny," she said, a shade of petulance creeping into the weary whisper. "What have I been doing? What might I be doing at my age? Know how old I am, Roan?"

He nodded.

"A hundred and eighty-three come spring," she said, ignoring him. "I've seen a lot in my time. The stories I could tell you . . . Did you know I was born in the Africa Colony?"

He nodded again, and again she ignored him. "Yes indeedy, I was about your age when all this started, when the transplat broke the bubble we lived in and scattered us all over the world."

Yes, you saw it happen! he thought, for the first time fully realizing something he had merely knew statistically before. *You saw folk dancing chest to chest and having food together and no one thinking a thing about it. You knew the culture before there was any real privacy or decency—you, who are the most private and decent of people today. The stories you could tell? Oh, yes—couldn't you, though! What did they call them before they called them 'flower shops'?*

Certain she couldn't conceivably divine his motivations, he asked, "What did people *do* then, Granny? I mean—today, if you could name one single job all of us had to do, it would be keeping the perfection we have. Could you say that you folks had any one thing like that?"

Her eyes lighted. Granny had the brightest eyes and the whitest, soundest teeth of anyone he knew. "Sure we had." She closed her eyes. "Can't say we thought much about perfection—not in the early days. I think the main job was the next step up. The next step up," she repeated, savoring the phrase. "You know, Roan, what we have today—well, we're the first people in human history that wasn't working on that, one way or another. They'd ought to teach human history nowadays. Yes, they should. But I guess most folks wouldn't like it. Anyway, folks always wanted

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to be a bit better in those days.

"Sometimes they stopped dead a couple hundred years and tried to make their souls better, and sometimes they forgot all about their souls and went ahead gettin' bigger and faster and tougher and noisier. Sometimes they were real wrong and sometimes they did right just by accident; but all the time they worked and worked on that next step up. Not now," she finished abruptly.

"Of course not. What would we do with a step up? What would we step up to?"

SHE said, "Used to be when nobody believed you could stop progress. A grass seed can bust a piece of granite half in two, you know. So can a cup o' water if you freeze it in the right place."

"We're different," he said smugly. "Maybe that's the real difference between us and other kinds of life. We can stop."

"You can say that again." He did not understand her inflection. Before he could wonder about it, she said, "What do you know about psi, Roan?"

"Psi?" He had to search his mind. "Oh—I remember it. Fad and Fashion was selling it a couple of years ago. I thought it was pretty silly."

"*That!*" she said, with as much scorn as her fragile, distant-wind voice could carry. "That was a weejee-board. That thing's older'n anyone knows about. It didn't deserve the name of psi. Well, look here—for ten thousand years, there've been folks who believed that there was a whole world of powers of the mind—telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation, clairvoyance, clairaudience . . . lots more. Never mind, I'm not going to give you a lecture," she said, her eyes suddenly sparkling.

He realized that he had essayed a yawn—just a small one—with his mouth closed, and that she had caught him at it. He flushed hotly. But she went right on.

"All I'm saying is this—there's plenty of proof of this power if you know where to look. One mind talks to another, a person moves in a blink from place to place without a transplat, a mind moves material things, someone knows in advance what's going to happen—all this by mind power. Been going on for thousands of years. All that time, nobody understood it — and now nobody needs to. But it's still around."

He wondered what all this had to do with the subject at hand. As if she had heard him wonder, she said, "Now you wanted to know what the next step up might be, in case anybody was interested. Well, that's it."

"I can't see that as a step upward," he said, respectfully but

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positively. "We already do move things—speak over distances—all those things you mentioned. We even know what's going to happen next. Everything is arranged that way. What good would it be?"

"What good would it be to move the operators off the transplats?"

"Oh, that's an economy."

"What would you call it if telekinesis and teleportation moved goods and people without the transplat?"

"*Without the transplat?*" he almost shouted. "But you—but we—"

"We'd all be in the same boat with those operators you're replacing."

"The op — I never thought about them!"

She nodded.

Shaken, he mused, "I wonder why the Private never thought of that when I told him about it this morning."

There was a dry, delighted sound from deep in the old chest. "He wouldn't. He never did understand how anything works. He just rides it."

ROAN controlled himself. One did not listen to criticism of one's parents. But this was Great Mam herself. The effort for control helped bring the whole strange conversation into perspective and he laughed weakly. "Well, I hardly think we're going to have any such—economy—as that."

She raised her eyebrows. "This progress we were talking about. You know, even in my time most folks had the idea that humans planned human progress. But when you come to think of it, the first human who walked upright didn't do it because he wanted to. He did it because he already could." When she saw no response on his face, she added, "What I mean is that *if* the old-timers were right and progress *can't* be corked up, then it's just going to bust loose. And if it busts loose, it's going to do it whether you're the head of J. & D. Walsh or a slag-mucker, whether you're happy about it or not."

"Well, I don't think it will happen."

"Haven't you been listening to me? It's *always* been with us."

"Then why didn't they—why should it show up now and not a thousand years from now?"

"We never stopped progressing before—not like this," she said, with a sweeping glance at the walls and ceiling which clearly indicated the entire planet.

"Granny, do you *want* this to happen? *You?*"

"What I want doesn't matter. There've always been people who had—powers. All I'm suggesting

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is that now, of all times, is the moment for them to develop—now that we don't develop in any other way."

He was persistent. "You think it's a good thing, then?"

She hesitated. "Look at me, how old I am. Is that a good thing? It doesn't matter—it happened—it had to happen."

"Why have you told me this?" he whispered.

"Because you asked me what was occupying me," she said, "and I figured to tell you, for a change. Frighten you?"

Sheepishly, he nodded.

She did, too, and laughed. "Do you good. In my day, we were frightened a whole lot. It took us a long way."

He shook his head. *Do you good?* He failed to see what good could come of any so-called "progress" that threatened the transplat. Why, what would happen to things? What would happen to their very way of life—to privacy itself, if anyone could—what was it, teleport?—teleport into a man's office or cubicle . . .

"Look, boy, you don't have to wait until it's your turn to come chat with your old Granny, you know. Come over anytime you have something to talk about. Just let me know first, that's all."

There was nothing in life he wanted less than another session like this one, but he remembered to thank her. "Byemam."

"Byeboy."

He rushed out to the dialpost and feverishly got the number of his home. He stepped up on the platform and the last he saw of Granny's face through the open panel was her expression of—was it pity?

Or perhaps compassion was a better name for it.

IV

HE went straight to his cubicle, brushing past his sister as she stood at the edge of the court. He thought she was going to speak, but deliberately showed his back and quickened his stride. Her kind of smugness, her endless, placid recitations of her day's occupations, were the prime thing he could do without at the moment. He needed privacy, lots of it, and right now.

He leaned back against the panel when it closed. His head spun. It was a head which had the ability to thrust indigestible ideas into compartments, there to seal them off from one another until he had time to ruminate. This was how he was able to handle so many concurrent business affairs. It was also how he had been able to get through this extraordinary day—till then. But the compartments were full; nothing else must happen.

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He had awakened before daylight to see, in the soft glow of the walls, a girl in a flowing garment who regarded him gravely. Her hair had been golden and her hands were clasped over one knee. He had not been able to see her feet—not then.

He had stepped on the 'plat to get to the office and had arrived, instead, in an unmentionable place containing drapes and this same girl. She had spoken to him.

He had seen her again, perched on his desk.

He had lost two hours in an unwonted self-examination, which had left him bewildered and unsure of himself, and had gone most respectably to see his most respectable grandmother, who had filled him full of the most frightening conjectures he had ever experienced—including the one which brought this mad business full circle. For she had suggested to him that, by a force called tele-something-or-other, certain people might appear just anywhere, transplat or no transplat.

He snorted. You didn't need a transplat to have a dream! He had dreamed the girl here and in the draped court. He had dreamed her in the office. "There!" he said to himself. "Feel better?"

No.

Anyone who had dreams like that had to be off his 'plat.

All right: they *weren't* dreams.

In which case, Granny was right; someone had something so much better than a transplat that the world — his world — would come to an end. If only this were a technologial development, it could be stopped, banned, to maintain the Stasis. But it wasn't —it was some weird, illogical, uncontrollable mystery known to only certain people *and he, Roan, wasn't one of them.*

It was unthinkable, insupportable. Indecent!

GOING into his flower shop, he reached for his dinner ration. He grunted in surprise, for instead of the usual four tablets and tumbler of vitabroth, his hand fell on something hot, slightly greasy and fibrous. He lifted it, turned it over. It was like nothing edible he had ever seen before. On the other hand, there had been innovations from time to time, as the Nutrient Service saw fit to allow for this or that change in the environment, the isolation of mutated bacteria and their antibiotics, the results of their perpetual inventory of sample basals.

But this thing was far too big to be swallowed. Maybe, he thought suddenly, it was a combination of nutrients and roughage.

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His teeth sank readily into it. Hot, reddish juice dribbled down his chin and a flavor excruciatingly delectable filled his mouth and throat, his nostrils and, it seemed, his very eyes. It was so good, it made his jaw-hinges ache.

He demolished the entire portion before it had a chance to get cold, then heaved a marveling sigh. He fumbled about the food-shelf in the vain hope of finding more—but that was all, except for the usual broth. He lifted the cup, then turned and carefully poured it down the sink. Nothing was going to wash that incredible flavor out of his mouth as long as he could help it.

He slipped into his dressing shield and changed rapidly. As he transferred his wallet, he paused to glance into it to see if it needed replenishing.

He grunted with the impact of memory. As he had left the Private's office, he had come face to face with his—with that—well, dream or no, there she had been. And had disappeared. And on the corner of his desk, just where she had sat, had been the 'plat number—*this* number, here in his hand.

Like the dream she was—wasn't she?—the girl had not spoken to him here in his cubicle or in the office. But in the draped court she had. That episode, improbable as it seemed, could hardly have been a dream. He had dialed that transplat to get there. He might have misdialed, but he had been wide awake when he did it.

She must be one of those—those next-step-upward monsters Granny was talking about, he decided. He had to know, had to speak to her again. Not because of her hair, of course, or the brazen garment. It was because of the transplat, because of the hard-won Stasis that held society together. It was a citizen's simple duty to his higher pink toes. No, his higher self.

HE adjusted a fresh pair of gloves and strode out to the court. Valerie was still there, looking wistful.

"Roan!"

"Later," he barked, already spinning the dial.

"*Please!* Only a minute!".

"I haven't got a minute," he snapped and stepped up on the platform. The flicker of blackness cut off her pleading.

He stepped down from his arrival platform and stopped dead.

No drapes! No perfume! No—oh, holy Private in Heaven!

"Roan *Walsh!*" squeaked Corsonmay. The secretary's eyeballs all but stood out on her dry cheekbones. Under them, her hands — decently gloved, thank

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the powers—were pressed, and in her hair obscenely hung a comb which, he deduced, he had interrupted in midstroke. He saw instantly what had happened, and a coruscation of fury and embarrassment spun dazzlingly inside him.

She must have seen him throw away the number she had written down for him and supplied him with another. And he had had to go and assume that it was . . . oh, to expect the drapes, the arms, the—and all that—and to come face to face with *this!*

"Private!" she shrilled. "*Mam! Mam!*" Calling her parents. Well, of course. Any decent girl would.

He dived for the dialpost. So did she, but he got there first.

"Don't go, Roan Walsh," she panted. "Corsonmay and my father, they're not here, they would have been if only I'd known, they'll be back soon, so *please* don't go."

"Look," he said, "I found the number on my desk and I thought Grig Labine had left it there. I was supposed to see him and I'm late now. I'm sorry I invaded your privacy, but it was a mistake, see? Just a mistake."

The eagerness faded from her almost-wrinkled face and homely hot eyes. She seemed to shrink two inches in a tenth of a second. Her mouth pouted, wet and pathetic, and quivering puckers appeared at its sides. *Oh, you stinker, what did she ever do to you?* he said to himself.

"Be serene," he blurted. He dialed his home.

"Oh-h-h-h . . ." Her wail was cut off by the transplat.

He stood where he was, his eyes squeezed closed on his embarrassment, and breathed hard.

And then he became aware of a whimpering "Please . . ." and, for one awful moment, thought Corsonmay's transplat had not operated. He opened his eyes cautiously and then sighed and stepped down. He was home. It was Valerie who was whimpering.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Roan," she wept, "*please* don't be angry with me. I know I was a beast. It was just—oh, I meant it, but I didn't have to be so . . ."

"What are you talking about?"

"When you called about wanting me to go to Granny's."

THAT seemed so long ago and so completely trivial. "Forget it, Val. You were absolutely right. I went, so forget it."

"You're not mad?"

"Of course I'm not."

"Well, I'm glad, because I want to talk to you. Can I?" she begged.

This was unusual. "What about?"

"Can we go out, Roan?"

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"Where are the parents?"

"In the Family Room. We can be right back. Please, Roan," she pleaded.

He yielded. In his cosmos, Val was merely a perennial and harmless irritation; this was probably the first time he had consciously realized that she might be a person, too, with personal problems.

"Grosvenor Center?" he asked.

She nodded. He dialed it and stepped up on the platform and down again at Grosvenor. It was still daylight there and he wondered vaguely where on Earth it might be. The sea on one side was an evening blue, the mountaintop a glory.

Val appeared on the transplat and stepped down. They walked silently past the decorator and the Fad and Fashion and the restaurant until they reached the park. They sat down side by side on a bench, with its shoulder-high partitions between each seat, and looked at the fountain.

She was very pale and her shoulders were moving under the cape, a complex motion that was partly stifled sobs and partly the kneading of hands.

He said, as gently as he could, "What's up?"

"You don't like me."

"Aw, sure I do. You're all right."

"No, please don't like me. I don't *want* you to. I came to you because you don't like me."

This was completely incomprehensible to Roan. He decided that listening might extract more data than talking.

Valerie said in a low voice, "I've got to tell you something that would make you hate me if you didn't already, so that's why. Oh, Roan, I'm no *good*!"

He opened his mouth to deny this, but closed it silently. He had the wit not to agree with her, either.

"There's somebody I—saw. I have to see him again, talk with him. He's — I want — *Oh!*" she cried, and burst into tears.

ROAN fumbled for a clean handkerchief and passed it deftly around the front of the partition, down low. He felt it taken from his fingers.

"A May's supposed to wait," she said brokenly, "and one day her Private will come looking for her, and he will be her Private, and she will be his help and service until the end. But I don't want to be help and service to the Private who comes. Who knows, one might come any minute. I want *this* one to come!"

"Maybe he will," soothed Roan. "Who is he?"

"I don't *know*!" she said in agony. "I only saw him. Roan, you have to find him for me."

"Well, where—"

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"He's tall, as tall as you," she said hurriedly. "His eyes are green. He has—" she gulped and her voice sank—"long hair, only not like a May. And right on the bottom of his chin there's a little cleft and on one side—yes, on the left side—there's a little curl of a scar."

"Hair? Men don't have long hair!"

"*This* one has."

"Now look," he said, suppressing his laughter at the outlandish concept. "If there were such a man, long hair and all, *everybody'd* know where he is."

"Yes," she said miserably.

"So there you are. There's no such man."

"But there *is*! I *saw* him!"

"Where?" She was silent. He said impatiently, "If you don't tell me where, how can I find him?"

"I can't tell you," she said at last, painfully. "It doesn't matter — you'd never find him — there." She colored. "He must be somewhere else, too. Please find him, Roan. His name. Where he is. Even if he never—I'd like to know what his name is," she finished wistfully. She stood up. "The Private will miss us."

On the way back to the transplat, she said to the air straight in front of her, "You think I'm just awful, don't you?"

"No!" he said warmly. "Some-

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times I think everyone's just a little different from what the Stasis expects. It isn't 'awful' to be a little different." And his subconscious, instead of objecting, dropped its prim jaw in astonishment.

V

THE Family Room was the heart of their house, as such rooms were to every house on Earth. A chair—virtually a throne—dominated one wall. It held the video controls and the audio beams which came to audible focus in their proper places in the room—the miniature of the throne at the right wall, which was the place of the son of the house; the wooden bench at the left, which was the daughter's; and the small stool at the throne's foot, where the mother sat.

The room, because of its beams and its padded floor and acoustically dead walls and ceiling, was a silent one and it was the custom for each family to convene there for two hours at the end of the day. There were stylized prayers, such reading as the Private chose, whatever conversation he dictated and, when he was so moved, transmitted entertainment of his choice for the clan.

When Roan and Valerie entered, the original silence was compounded by towering disap-

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proval. The Private's hand lay on the video control, which he had just switched off. The Mam's head had bobbed once, sidewise, so engrossed had she been in the program; it was if a prop had been snatched away.

Son and daughter separated and went to their places. Roan felt the old hovering terror as the Private's gaze flicked across his withers like a rowel. He sat down and glanced quickly at his sister. She huddled on her bench so oppressed, so indrawn, that even her wrinkle-free, foldless garments could not conceal her crushed look. Roan, with hands properly folded, swallowed apprehensively.

"Late," said the Private. "*Both* of you. This sort of thing can hardly help in my recommendations, Valerie, you unwanted creature." This was an idiom used in chastising all Mays and passed Valerie by. Then, to Roan, "One would assume that my generosity and forgiveness" — that would be the hint about the partnership—"would result in at least a minimal effort not to repeat the offense. You are thirty years of age—old enough to know the difference between Stasis and chaos. You will be confined, by my personal lock, to your cubicle for forty-eight hours, where you may reflect on the consequences of disorganization. *Valerie*!"

She twitched and gave the proper response, which was to meet his eyes. Roan said nothing. In such occasions, there was no appeal.

"Valerie, were you and your brother together in whatever escapade it was that led you to flout the organization of this house?"

"Yes, Private, but it was really my—"

"Then you must bear the same punishment — not primarily for being tardy, which is not one of your habitual defects, but for your failure to use your influence on your irresponsible sibling. I assume you failed to try, since it would be too painful for me to conclude that both my offspring lacked the basic elements of decency."

ANOTHER massive silence followed. The mother, sitting at his feet, rolled her eyes upward to the cushions, where his gloved hand lay. With a slight, unconscious movement, her ear sought the focal point of the currently non-existent audio beam. The Private's beard bulged as he dropped his glare upon her.

"And since I must cling to a single shred of satisfaction," he said, "let it be my faith in *your* knowledge of correct behavior, Mam. Assuming that this knowledge exists, the circumstance

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clearly indicates that you too have not properly applied it. There will therefore be no video for you tonight." He unleashed a semi-circular glare in which his beard smote across their presences like the back of a hand. "Leave me."

They rose and shuffled out. The panel slid shut behind them. "I'm sorry." Val barely breathed the apology.

"*Silence!*" roared the grille over the door.

They hung their heads and waited. Walshmam tiptoed away and returned in a moment with two small cubes. She led Valerie to her cubicle and stood aside. Valerie glanced once at Roan, who twitched a dismal smile at her. Then the panel slid shut on her and Walshmam pressed one of the cubes into its socket, effectively sealing the door until removed again from this side. True to custom, Roan waited until she passed him and then shuffled along behind her to his own cubicle.

"And furthermore," enounced the grille over the door, "I herewith refuse to consider the merits of the suggestion you made this morning. For, if good, it issues from an unworthy source and is tainted—if bad, it deserves no consideration."

Walshmam seemed very sad, but then few Mams were anything else. Their lives alternated between silent patience and silent regret, with only an occasional flicker of preventive action. He grimaced in an effort to convey a certain camaraderie, but she misunderstood and looked away, and he knew she had taken it as a rebellious or unrepentant expression.

He wondered, as he dropped the dressing shield over his head, what would happen if he got up and hauled on the Private's beard.

Reaching for his brief nightshirt and sleeping shorts and bedshoes, he told himself, "I bet he hasn't even got anything in his rulebook to cover that. And he never was so good with a new idea."

That reminded him of what Granny had said—the Private "never did understand how anything works. He just rides it." He sure rides his family, Roan thought.

SO he himself would be a Private some day, have a family and get it all back again, he thought sleepily, and let himself sink down and down into a place where he sat on a monstrous throne with a beard to his knees, and watched his father, who sat on the boy's chair, weeping. At his feet was — well, for heaven's sake, *it was Granny!*

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At some point, it must have turned into a nightmare—a dreadful fragment involving being lost in the flicker of final black that one experienced on the transplat. Here, however, he was immersed in it, with dimensionless space at his freezing back and the unyielding "inner" surface of reality pressing into his face. He cried out and struggled —and thumped his cheekbone on solid rock. He yelped and pressed away from the rock and sat up.

Not an inch from his head was the lintel of a shimmering, rectangular rock. Beyond it, a pale, green, alien sky which brightened by the moment.

He glanced behind him and saw nothing but purple plain, cracked and crevassed, from which cactuslike spears sprouted grotesquely.

He stepped through the doorway and, a few yards beyond, the desolation abruptly ended. Before him stretched rolling parkland, then a curving line of trees following a brook. Across the brook were fields — one brown, one tan, one a tender green— and they seemed, at this distance, as smooth as the surface of a cup of milk. To the right were mountains, one with a flaming cap so brilliant, his eyes stung. He recognized it as dawnlight on snow. To the left was a broad rolling valley. The air was warm but sparkling-fresh.

He paused and inhaled deeply, seeking comprehension, then saw, to his right, a boulder as big as a Private chair. On the boulder sat a girl with golden hair and strange eyes. She wore a belted singlet that revealed far more girl than Roan had ever seen before. She held one delicately bronzed, bare knee in both hands. Her bare feet acknowledged the snowfire pinkly, and they were wet with dew.

She laughed a greeting and rose and flowed over to him. "Come along," she said.

He clutched himself and hid his naked hands. With a swift, strong movement, she had his hand in hers.

"Up we go," she sang and, before he could think, she was leading him.

His cheek touched her bare shoulder. He smelled her perfume and her sweet breath, and his eyes rolled up and his knees sagged. Her arm went briefly round his shoulders and she laughed again.

"It's all right, it's only a dream," she told him.

"A dre — " he coughed — "eam?"

"Thirsty?" She held out her hand, and he started violently when a cup appeared in it. "Here you are."

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HE took it, hesitated, then raised it. She still stood, smiling at him. Modestly he turned his back and drank. It was bright orange, cold, sweet-acid and delicious. He patted his lips carefully and turned back, waving the cup helplessly.

"Throw it," she said.

"Th—what?"

She gestured. Obediently, he tossed the cup straight up. It vanished.

"Feel better? Come on, they're all waiting for you."

Gaping up at the spot into which the cup had vanished, Roan said. "I want to go home."

"You can't. Not until the dream's finished."

He put his arms straight down and fluttered his hands until the cuffs concealed them. "I want to go home," he said forlornly.

"Why?"

"I just . . ." He looked longingly over his shoulder at the doorway. When he looked back, she was gone. And suddenly, urgently, he wanted her back. He took a step forward.

"*Boo!*" she said, her lips just touching the nape of his neck.

He whirled, and there she stood. "Where were you?"

"Here—anywhere." She vanished and reappeared instantly at his right.

"Please," he said, "don't do that any more. And just let me stand here quietly for a minute."

"All right." She wandered away, picked a snowdrop and a strange green-and-purple flower, added a fern-frond and came back toward him, her fingers deft and a-dance. She held out the flowers, woven into a tiny circular wreath, and spun them on her finger. Then she set them into her golden hair.

"Pretty?"

"Yes." His eyes fell away from her and were dragged back again. "Why don't you cover your arms?" he blurted.

"We wear what we please here."

"Where is *here?*"

"Sort of another world." He glanced back at the gateway. "It wouldn't do any good," she explained. "There isn't anything in there now but blackness. The way out is a time, not a place. Don't be afraid. You'll go back when it's time."

"When?"

"How long did you have to sleep?"

"Forty-eight hours, though I'd never—"

"Maybe you can stay that long. Who's to know?"

"You're—sure I'll get back in time?"

"Sure as sure. Is it all right now?"

Shyly, he smiled. "Fine. Everything's fine."

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SHE took his hand, and skipped two paces, so he had to follow. He tried politely to tug his hand free, but she held fast and seemed not to notice. A giggle, a blush, the slightest sign of self-consciousness in her, and he would have found the contact unbearable.

But she was so completely at ease that the revulsion would not come, and she chattered so gaily, making him answer, keeping him busy, that, even had he felt like asking her to let go, he had no space for the words, nor the words with which to do it.

"You were in my cubicle," he said breathlessly, as she hurried him down the slope.

"Oh, yes—more than you know. I watch you sleep. You sleep nicely. There's a tanager!" She stopped, balancing, something flowing out of her shining face to the blazing bird and back again. "I came to see you at your office, too. Everything's straight and hard there, and sort of lonely. But all you people are lonely."

"We're not!"

"You wait until the dream's finished and you won't say that. Want to see a magic?" She stooped, still walking, and brushed her long fingers across a thick growth of tiny spiked leaves. They all closed up like little green fists.

"Why'd you come?" he asked.

"Because you were ready to wonder."

"Wonder what?"

She appeared not to consider this worth answering, but released his hand and bounded like a deer once, twice, then high over a brook. He floundered through it, soaking his bedshoes.

When he caught up with her, she touched his chest.

"Shh!"

On the wind floated a note, then another note and, high and sweet, another, so that they became a chord. Then a note changed, and another, and another, and the chorus of voices modulated softly, like the aurora, which is the same as long as one looks, but changes if one looks away and back.

"WHAT'S your name?" he asked abruptly.

"What would you like it to be?"

"*Flower!*" he cried, the strange pressures of a dream asserting themselves; and with it he felt a liberation from the filth with which custom had clothed the word.

"And you're Roan, and a roan is a horse with wind in his mane and thunder in his feet, sweet-nostriled, wild-eyed, all courage and speed."

He thought it was a phrase from a song, yet it could have

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been speech—her speech. He squished the water in his muddy shoes and almost whinnied with delight at the thought of the thunder in his feet. She took his hand again and they leaped together to the brow of a foothill. Ahead, the song finished in a roar of good laughter.

"Who is it?" he wanted to know.

"You'll see. There—*there!*"

Where the hill shouldered into the forest was a clear, deep pool. In the forest and on the hillside, buildings nestled. Their walls were logs and their roofs were thatch. They were low and wide, and very much part of the hill and the woods. In the clearing between woods and slope, by the pool, was a great trestle table and, around the table, were the people who had been singing—you could tell by the sound of their laughter.

"I can't—I *can't!*" Roan croaked miserably.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Flower.

"They have no decency!"

"There are only two things which are indecent—fear and excess—and you'll see neither here. Look again."

"So many limbs," he breathed. "And the colors—a green-and-red man, a blue woman . . ."

"A blue dress and a harlequin suit. It's grand to wear colors."

"There are some things one shouldn't even dream."

"Oh, no! There's nothing you can't dream. Come and see."

They went to see. They were made very welcome.

VI

AT dusk, on the second day, Flower and Roan walked a shadowed aisle in the forest. Roan's sleeping garments were tattered and seam-gutted, for he would not give them up, though they had not been designed for the brutality they had suffered. Yet he did not mind the rips and gapes, for no one else did. His bedshoes were long gone and he felt that if he were told he would never again feel the coolth of moss under his bare feet, or the tumble of brook-sand, he would die. He knew the Earth as something more than a place on which to float sealed cities. He had worked till he hurt, laughed till he cried, slept till he was healed. He had helped with a saw, with a stone, with a song. Wonder on wonder, and greatest wonder of all—the children.

He had never seen any before. He did not know where children came from except that, when they were twelve, they went to their families from the crèches. He did not know how they were born. He did know that each

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child was educated specifically for a place in his Family and in the Stasis, and that the largest part of this education was a scrubbing and soaking and rubbing in of the presence of the father—his voice, features, manners of living and speaking and working. When the child emerged, there was a place for him in the home, by then very little different from his last place in the crèche, and he was fitted to it, not by the accidental authority of parentage, but through the full-time labors of a bank of specialists.

Each family had one boy, one girl—one trade, one aim. This was how an economy could be balanced and kept balanced. This was how the community could raise its young and still maintain the family.

But here, in this dream . . .

Children babbled and sang and burned their fingers. They ran howling underfoot and swam like seals in the pool. They fought and, later, loved. They grieved, sweated, made their music and their mistakes. It was all very chaotic and perplexing and made for a strong, sane settlement which knew how to laugh and how to profit from an argument. It was barbarous and very beautiful.

And it had a power—for these people quite casually did what Roan had seen Flower do. They seemed to have a built-in transplat and could send and receive from anywhere to anywhere. They could reach up into nothingness and take down bread or a hatchet or a book. They could stand silently for a time and then know what a wife would serve for nutrient—which they brazenly sat together to eat, though they went privately for other functions no more disgusting—or the tune of a new song or news of a find of berries.

They seemed willing enough to tell him how all this was done, yet his questions got him nowhere. It was as if he needed a new language or perhaps a new way of thinking before he could absorb the simple essence. But for all their power, they had callouses on their hands. They burned wood as fuel and ate the yield of the land around them. To put it most simply, they made their bodies function at optimum because it made them joyful. They never let the *psi* factor turn, cancerlike, from a convenience to a luxury.

SO Roan walked quietly in the dusk, Flower at his side, thinking about these things and trying to shake them down into a shape he could contain. "But, of course, this isn't real," he said suddenly.

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"Just a dream," nodded Flower.

"I'll wake."

"Very soon." She laughed then and took his hands. "Don't look so mournful. We're never very far away!"

He couldn't laugh with her. "I know, but I feel that this is—I can't say it, Flower. I don't know how!"

"Then don't try for now."

Before he knew it, his arms were around her. "Flower—please let me stay."

She stirred in his arms. "Don't make me sad," she whispered.

"Why can't I? Why?"

"Because it's your dream, not mine."

"I won't let you go! I'll hold onto you and I won't wake up!" He staggered then and fell heavily. Flower stood calmly ten feet away.

"Don't make me sad," she said again. "It hurts me to push you away like this."

He climbed slowly to his feet and held out his hand. "I won't spoil any more of it," he said huskily.

They walked silently in the dimness, toward the shaft of light which the Sun lay up the valley to the settlement each evening at this season.

"How soon?" he asked, because he could not help himself.

"When it's time," she said. She released his hand, put her arm through his and took his hand again. They came to the light.

Roan looked slowly from one end of the clearing to the other, trying to see it as it had been to him at first, then as it was with the familiarity of two days. There was the kettle they used, they said, to make sugar from the maples, and he pretended he had seen it boil, seen the frantic dogs snapping the caramelized sweetmeat up from the snow and running in circles frantically until it melted and they could get their silly mouths open again. There was the buckwheat field which would carpet the spring snow with quick emerald on a warm day. There was the pond, there the ducks with old-ivory webs and mother-of-pearl lost in their necks. He saw—

"There!" he yelled and twisted away from Flower, to go racing across the clearing. "You!" he shouted. "You! *Stop!* You by the pool!"

But the man did not turn. He was tall, as tall as Roan; his hair was very long, his eyes were green and, at the side of his cleft chin, was a curl of a scar. In the water, there was a chuckle of laughter, a flash of white.

"You with the scar," Roan gasped. "Your name—I've got to know your—"

As the man turned, Roan look-

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ed past his shoulder, down at the water, straight into the startled eyes of his sister Valerie.

And that was the end of the dream.

ONLY one good thing had happened since his mother had removed the block from his cubicle door. The cubicle itself had been the most depressing conceivable place to wake up in; its walls crushed him, its filtered air made him cough. It had no space, no windows. The dressing shield brought out a thudding in his temple and he hurled it to the floor, turning violently away from it, physically and mentally. He felt that if he itemized the symbolism of that tubular horror, he would go berserk and tear this coffin-culture apart corpse by corpse. Breakfast was an abhorrence. The clothes—well, he put them on, not daring to be angry about them, or he never would have gotten to the office.

Corsonmay looked his way only long enough to identify, then stuck her silly flaccid face in a file-drawer until he was safely in his office. He looked at the desk, its efficient equipment, at the vise-jaws called walls and the descending heel called a ceiling, and he shook with anger. But he was weak with it when the heavy voice issued from the grille: "Step in here, Roan Walsh."

Trouble again. Out of the prison into the courtroom.

He took four great breaths, three for composure, one a sigh. He went to the panel and it admitted him. His father sat back, his head and beard vying texture against texture. Before him was a scattering of field reports, and he looked as if he had nibbled the corner off one of them and found it unexpectedly good.

"Good Stasis, Private."

The old man nodded curtly. "Your absence made it necessary for me to take up the threads of your work as well as my own. You will find what I have done on reports subsequent to yours." He stacked the cards neatly and scattered them. "On reviewing these, I found to my surprise—my pleasant surprise, I may add in all fairness—that you have done a phenomenal amount of work. Kimberley, Krasniak, that warehouse tangle in Polska. And in spite of its speed, the work is good. I investigated it in detail."

This, thought Roan, sounded *really* bad. He put his hands behind him, lowered his chin in The Stance, and set his teeth.

"The investigation brings out," lumbered the vocal juggernaut, "that the work was done in roughly speaking four hours, three and one-half minutes. Very good. It seems, further, that the elapsed time involved was five hours,

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forty-eight minutes and some odd seconds. Approximately, that is." He tapped the edges of the cards on the desk, flickered the lightning at Roan, then snapped forward and roared, "One hour and forty-five minutes seem to have disappeared here!"

ROAN wet his lips and croaked, "There was noonrest, Private."

The Private leaned back and stretched jovially. "Splendid, my efficient young scoundrel. Superb! And what is the noonrest permitted us at our present altitude in the organization?"

"Forty minutes, Private."

"Good. Now all we have to account for is one hour and five minutes. Sixty-five precious, irredeemable minutes, which the resources of Stasis itself could not buy back. Over an hour unreported, yet somehow a double-time dock from your wages is not entered here. Or perhaps it is entered and, in my haste, I overlooked it."

"No, Private."

"Then either one or more transactions of company affairs were handled on that afternoon and not reported—which is gross inefficiency—or the time was spent on idling and personal indulgence, with every intention of accepting payment from the firm for this time—which is stealing."

Roan said nothing except to himself, and that was, almost detachedly, "I think I can stand about four minutes, thirty-two and three-tenths seconds — approximate—more of this."

"The picture is hardly a pleasant one," said the Private conversationally, and smiled. "The records give me the choice of three courses of action. First, the time owed may be made up. Second, the value of these hours may be paid back. Third, I can turn you over to Central Court with a full indictment, and thereby wash my hands of you. You might be given a bow and arrow and left to make your way in the wilderness between segments of Stasis. You could survive a long time with your training. Days. Weeks even."

"Eighteen, seventeen, sixteen . . ." Roan counted silently.

"However, I am going to give you every opportunity to ameliorate this—this frightful crime. Take these cards into your office. You have between now and 1600—a punctual 1600, that is—in or out of the office, to revise any slight miscalculations you may have made and to refresh your memory in the event that you did useful work for the firm in any of these lost minutes. Every alteration you make, of course, will be checked to the tenth of a second. Until 1600—be serene."

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Roan, quite numb, tottered forward, took the cards, muttered, "Byepry," and awkwardly backed out.

Why, he wondered, did he stand for it?

Because there was no place to go, of course.

There was . . .

No, there wasn't. That had been a dream.

He sank into a black paralysis of rage.

VII

THE phone roused him. He received, ready to tear the head off the caller, any caller. But it was Valerie.

She said, "It's nearly noon-rest." She would not meet his eyes. "Could you—would you mind . . .?"

"Same place, right away?"

"Oh, *thank* you, Roan!"

He growled affectionately and broke off.

She was not at the Grosvenor transplat when he got there, so he stalked straight to the park. She was waiting for him. He dropped down next to her and put his head in his hands—and damn the passers-by. Never seen a man's hands before?

He sat up after a while, however; Valerie's silence positively radiated. He wondered if he should tell her about the man in the dream, and almost laughed. But he could not laugh at Valerie. Not now. In the dream, there had been love. Valerie, in her crushed, priggish way, had fallen in love. All right, tell her you still haven't found the guy and then sympathize with her and get it over with. You have some real worrying to do.

He turned to her. "I haven't been able to—"

"His name's Prester." She leaned close to the partition and whispered, "Oh, Roan, you saw me like that, in the pool. They hadn't meant for you to see me at all. Oh, what you must *think!*"

He said, just as softly, "I hadn't let myself believe it."

"I know," she said desperately. "I'm surprised you even came here."

"What do you mean—Oh, the pool! Do you know, it never occurred to me until this minute that you were—that you'd be—oh, forget it, Val. I'm just glad you found him. Prester, hm? Nice-looking fellow."

Her face lit up like a second sun. "Roan—*really?* I'm not a—hussy?"

"You're grand and the only person I know in this whole sterile, starched world who's managed to live a little! I'm *glad,* Val! You don't know—you can't — what I've been through. Enough to make a dozen dreams.

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And it came like a dream—I mean parts and chunks or real-life things—things Granny was maundering about, things I'd seen, a girl I met once wrong-dialing—an accident, you little prude! I believed it was just a dream—I had to, I guess. I had to believe Flower and she *told* me it was." Lord, he'd said the word right out loud in front of his sister!

But she was quite composed, cheeks excitement-red, not disgusted-red, eyes bright and distant. "She's lovely, Roan, just *beautiful*. She loves you. I *know*."

"Think she does?" He grinned till it hurt. "Oh, Val, Val—the maplesugar kettle."

"Mmm—the oat-field!"

"The big table and the singing!"

"Yes, and the children—all those children!"

"What happened?" he cried. "How could such a thing happen?"

SHE whispered fervently, "We could both be crazy. Or the whole world could be coming apart and we slipped in and out through a crack into—or maybe it really was a dream, but we had it together. But I don't care, it was beautiful and—and if you'd said I was a—because of—you'd have *spoiled* it and killed me, too. Is it all right then, Roan, is it really all right? Really?"

"You're sort of beautiful yourself. For a sister, that is."

"*Oooh!*" she squeaked, blushing and enormously pleased. Then, happily, "I'm glad I'm not you."

"Uh—why?"

"How does it work, what makes it go, is it a dream, and, if not, what could it be? Be like me, Roan. It happened — for the rest of my life it has *happened!* But—I hope there'll be more."

"If I find out how it works, what makes it go and so on, there *will* be more. So you just be glad *I'm* like me in that respect."

"If you found it, you—wouldn't keep me out?"

"If I couldn't take you," he said warmly, "I wouldn't go. Now do you feel better?"

"I'm going to kiss you!"

He roared with laughter at the very idea in a place like this and, under the stares this attracted, she cried, "Be quiet—thunderfeet!" At the phrase from Flower's little song, his heart twisted.

She peeped at his face and said, "I'm sorry, Roan."

"Don't be," he said hoarsely. "For that second, she was right here." He put out his hands, made fists, stared at them, then got them out of sight again. Flower—well, he'd have plenty of time to find her after 1600. "Val . . ."

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"I didn't know anyone could be so happy!" she said. "What, Roan?"

"Nothing. Just that I really am late," he said, abruptly changing his mind. No need to air his troubles to her now—the news services would take care of that about 1612. Meanwhile, let her stay happy.

They walked back to the transplat.

"Roan, let's come here every day and talk about it. I don't know a thing you did and you don't know what I did. Like the time—"

"Sure I will, sure," he said. "Take something pretty big to stop me."

She stopped dead. "There's something the matter."

"Get on your 'plat. Everything's fine. Hurry now."

She dialed and stepped up and was gone. He stood looking at the empty air, where her anxious face had been, until another passenger filled it. He hoped he hadn't worried her.

He walked slowly back to the bench and sat down, and that was where he had his big idea.

"WHOEVER *is* that?" The thin old voice was edgy.

"Me. Roan," he said from the court.

The top panel of a door slid back and the voice floated to him, gentle now, and firm. "You know you're welcome here, son, but you also know you're to call first. Just spin that dial and clear out of here for an hour. Then you can come and stay as long as you like."

"Petals to that. I haven't *got* an hour. Come on out here or I'm coming in."

"Don't you use that language on me, you leak-brained snipe, or I'll lift your hair with a blunt nailfile!"

The instant she began to shout, he began to roar, "Decent or not, just get on out here. *If you'd shut off your low-fidelity mouth for twelve lousy seconds, you'd stop wasting your own time!*"

They stopped yelling together and the silence was deafening. Suddenly, Granny laughed, "Boy, where'd you learn that type language?"

"For years, I've been hearing you talk, Great Mam," he said diffidently. "It only just now occurred to me that I never really listened. And about being decent—if you're comfortable, come as you are."

"Damfidon't!" She came out of the room and kicked the door closed with a flip of her heel. She wore an immense wrapper of an agonizing blue and seemed to be barefooted. Her hair, instead of lying sleekly away from the center part in two controlled wings,

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flew free like a May's. Roan had one frozen moment, and then she tossed the hair back on one side with an angry twitch of her head. "Well?" she blazed. There seemed to be nothing left of the gentle talc-on-ivory quality in her voice.

Slowly, he smiled. "Damfidon't like you better the way you are."

She sniffed, but she was pleased. "All you can do to keep your eyes from rolling out onto the carpet. Ah, well, you've found my secret. Reckon I'm old enough to have just one eccentricity?" she demanded challengingly.

"You've lived long enough to earn your privileges."

"Come on in here," she said, starting down the court. "Most folks don't or can't realize I've spent the least part of my life in that cone-in-cone getup. Everybody else around's practically born in it. I just don't *like* it. Chest-padding the men so they won't look different from women!" she snorted. "I wasn't brought up that way." She opened the manual door in the corner. "Here we are."

IT was an odd-shaped room, an isosceles triangle. He had never seen it before. "What happened to your voice, Granny? You feeling all right?"

In the familiar wind-in-the-distance tones, she said, "You mean you miss this little gasp?" Then, stridently, "Something I picked up for company. Had to. Nobody'd take me seriously when I talked natural. They cast me as a frail little pillar of respectability and, by the Lord, I was stuck with it. It's hot in here."

He missed the hint, waited for her to sit down, and then joined her. "Know why I'm here?"

She regarded him closely. "Sleeping well?"

"That wasn't a dream."

"No? What then?"

"I came to find out what it was. Where it is."

She fluttered the lapel of the wrapper. "You got this part of my secret life out of me, but that don't guarantee you all of it. What makes you so sure it wasn't a dream?"

"You just don't go to bed healthy and sleep for two days! Besides, there's Valerie. I saw her there, right at the very last second."

She grunted. "'Fraid of that. No one was sure." She laughed. "Must've been a picnic when you two got your heads together. You come here to kill me?"

"*What?*"

"Outraged brother and all that?"

"Valerie's happier than she's ever been in her life and so much in love, she can't see straight. I'm just as happy for her as she is for herself."

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"*Well!*" she smiled. "This changes things. So you want to take your sister and go live out your lives in a dreamland."

"It's more than that," he said. "I need one of your telekinesis operators. I mean *now*."

"The best I can do for you is a little girl who can knock down a balancing straight-edge at any distance under fifteen feet."

He made no attempt to conceal his scorn.

She pursed her lips thoughtfully. "How'd you mix me up in this, anyway?"

"We're wasting time," he said. "But if you must know, it was your hints to me last time I was here—the transplat obsolete, people appearing in any room anywhere, communication without phones. I'd already seen telekinesis twice, when you told me that. And since then . . ." he shrugged. "You *had* to be in it. Maybe you'd like to tell me why *I'm* mixed up in it."

"Hadn't planned to for a while. Maybe we'll step up the schedule. Now what's the all-fired rush?"

"I have an appointment in—" he checked—"less than two hours that is going to put me under the ground unless I can get help."

HE told her, rapidly, about the lost time and his father's threat.

"You're dead right," she said after a moment. "He's afraid of you. I don't know why he should be *that* afraid. He's just like his father, the potbellied old—" She stopped, shocked, as a large hand closed over her wrist.

"I can't listen to that."

"All right," she said with surprising swiftness. "I'm sorry. Given one of my TKs, what would you do?"

He leaned forward, put his elbows on his knees, bringing his gloved hands into plain sight.

"Do? I'm going to take this wrinkle-free civilization and turn it out into the woods. I'm going to clutter up the Family Rooms with the family's own children. I'm going to turn Stasis itself upside down and shake it till the blood runs into its head and it finds out how to sweat again."

Granny's eyes brightened. "Why?"

"I could tell you it was for the good of all the people—because you're Great Mam and lived through it all and had a chance to think about things like that. But I'm not going to say anything like that to you. No—I'll do it because I want to live that way myself, head of a family of hard-handed, barefoot, axe-swinging people who are glad to get up in the morning.

"I thought of finding the dream-people again. I even thought of going out into the

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wilderness between cities and living that way myself. But if I did, I'd always be afraid that some day a resources survey crew might find me, scoop me up and bring me back. Stasis wouldn't let people live like that, so let's make Stasis live our way."

He took a deep breath. "Now Stasis is built around the transplat. There can't ever be a better machine. But if I go in there today and claim I've spent years secretly developing one—if I get one of your people to start transmitting things all over his office and claim I have a new machine to do it with—why, the Private's got to listen. I'll save my job and spot your people through and through the whole culture till it falls apart. And one day maybe I'll be the Private at Walsh & Co.—and, Stasis, look out!"

"You know," she said. "I *like* you."

"Help me," he said bluntly. "I'll like you, too."

SHE rose and punched his arm with sharp knuckles. "I'll have to think. You know, if you can fast-talk your way out of this, you'll only stall things a little. The old—your father—wouldn't buy any parlor tricks. He'd want to see that machine."

"Then let's stall. Can you fix me up with a telekin—telekineticist? That what you call them?"

"TK," she said absently. "I've got something a heap better than any TK. How'd you like a stationless transplat — a matter transmitter that will lift anything from anywhere to anywhere without centrals or depots?"

"There's no such thing, Granny."

"Why do you say that?"

"All my life I've been a transplat man, that's why. There's a limiting factor on matter transmission. It must have a planetary field; it must have a directing central; it must have platforms built of untransmissible material and—"

"Don't tell *me* how a transplat works," she snapped. "Suppose a machine was designed on totally different principles. A force-pump instead of a suction pump. Or an Archimedes screw."

"There isn't any other principle! Don't you think I *know?*"

"I'll show you the damn machine!" She marched to the angled wall of the little room and bumped a scuff-plate near the floor. The entire wall slid upward into the ceiling, swift and silent. Lights blazed.

It was quite a laboratory. Much of its equipment he had thought existed only in factories. Most was incomprehensible to him.

Granny walked briskly down an aisle and stopped at the far

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wall. Ranged against it was a glittering cluster of equipment beneath a desk-sized control panel. The desk surface seemed to be a vision screen, though it was hinged at the top. At the side, he saw what looked like manipulator controls of the kind used in radiation laboratories.

"There's a servo-robot this size on a hill about forty miles from here," said Granny.

She turned a switch, sat down over the screen and began to spin two control wheels.

"Tell you what it does," she said abstractedly as she worked, "though this ain't really the way it does it. Plot a straight line out from this machine and a line from the other. Where they intersect, that's your transmission point. Now draw two more lines from the equipment and where *they* cross, that's the arrival point. When they're set up, you haul on this snivvy and what was *here* is now *there*. The stuff doesn't travel any more than it does with a transplat. It ceases to exist at one point and conservation of matter makes it appear at another.

"But you've created just the strain in space which makes it show up."

"Show me."

"All right. Call it."

"My old wallet. Top drawer, left side in the office. Drawer's locked, by the way," he said.

"What's the matrix?"

HE reeled off the address coordinates. She tapped them on a keyboard and bent over the screen. It showed a Stasis unit. She spun a wheel and the buildings rushed closer. Her hand dropped back to a vernier and the view slowed, seemed to press through the roof and hover over a desk.

"Right?"

"Go on," he said. "Pretty fair spy-ray you have there."

"You don't know!" She reached and from a speaker came the quiet bustle of the office. She went back to the controls and the view sank into the desktop. Suddenly, the contents of the drawer were there. With the manipulators, she deftly hooked the wallet, raised it a fraction. Then the scene disappeared as she shifted to another set of controls.

"Receiver location," she murmured. The garbled picture cleared, became a mass of girders and then a bird's-eye view of the room they stood in, so clear that Roan looked up with a start. He could see nothing. "Stick out your stupid hand," said Granny.

He obeyed and she brought the scene down to it until its image hung in the center of the picture. Roan wiggled his fingers. Granny cut back to the other view, check-

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ed it, then threw over the "snivvy" she had shown him earlier.

The wallet dropped into his hand.

She switched off, turned and looked up at him. "Well?"

He said, "Why play around like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"This thing doesn't do what you say it does. I got the wallet, sure, but not with that thing."

"Do tell. All right, how *did* you get the wallet?"

He considered the instrument carefully. "It's a sort of amplifier — yes, and range-finder, too. It just gets a fix for your TK man. Right?"

"You really think I've got a high-powered psychic hiding around here who does the work after I get to it with the finder?"

"*You're* the TK!"

She slumped resignedly at the controls. "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. Old Roman saying. If that's what you say it is, boy, then that's what it is."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" he grumbled, looking at his watch. "So now what do we do?"

"Wait a minute — I've got to get used to something." She hung over the console and then glanced up brightly. "I'll break out the pilot model. You can't tote this thing under your arm."

She went to a storage wall and dragged out a bin. In it was a long box. Roan helped her open it and lift out the spindly collection of coils and bars, setting it on a bench.

"I'll check you through this." She flung off her wrapper and advanced on the machine. "Just turn it on its side for me," she said. "What are you gawping at? Oh!" She looked down at her shorts and halter, and laughed. "I *told* you it was too hot in here."

IT was not that age had left no marks on her compact body, but certainly not two centuries' worth. Holding a light-duty soldering iron near her cheek, she slapped herself on the bare midriff.

"One thing you might keep in mind about women as you get to know 'em, Roany — the parts that the decent people expose are exactly the ones that get old first. This face of mine was gone at 75, but the tummy's good for another hundred yet." She bent over the device. "Maybe it's better that way, maybe not—who's to say? Hand me the millivoltmeter there."

After a time, her work with the machine took precedence over everything else in Roan's cosmos. "You sure can get around in there," he said, awed, as he held the light for her.

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"Think so?" she grunted, and went on working steadily.

VIII

AT 1451, Roan Walsh arrived at the Walsh Building. His head spun with its lopsided weight of advice, technical data and strategy. His arrival was in the warehouse, not in the office, for he brought a long wooden box on casters. He pushed the box himself up the long corridor to the office wing.

"Oh, Roan Walsh, can I help?"

"No, Corsonmay. Wait — Yes, come in." He put his hands on the end of the box and nodded at the dithering secretary. "Grab hold here."

She came close, tittered and let the tips of her gloves show for an instant before she slipped them clumsily under the end of the box.

Not that end up, you addlehead.

Roan yelped and let go. Corsonmay, now bearing most of the not inconsiderable weight, began to mew rapidly. Roan, sitting flat on the floor, gasped, "Who said that?"

"*Ewp!*" squeaked Corsonmay. "It's heavy!"

"Let it down. My God, Corsonmay, you're as strong as a horse!"

"That's the nicest thing you ever said to me," she beamed without sarcasm.

He turned to her, found himself face to face with her withered ardency. "What did you say about lifting up the wrong end, Corsonmay?"

"I didn't say anything."

I did.

"Byemay," he said, and forestalling her, added, "Really—nothing more. Byemay."

She left and he whirled, hunting futilely in midair. "Granny! Where are you?"

Briefly, just at eye-level, the business end of a needle-focus audio beam projector appeared. Roan patted it happily and it disappeared. Bless her, she'd be watching everything through her big machine, her audio aimed for his inner ear every second.

At 1559.5, the ceiling said, "Roan Walsh, you may step in now."

"Coming, Private." He all but started at the sound of his own voice. How was it that, though he seemed increasingly able to cope with anyone or anything, his father's voice still turned him to mush?

But that could wait. He stepped just inside the room.

"Come, come—stand close. I intend to do one of several things, but biting is not one of them."

Roan stayed where he was. "May I have the Private's per-

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mission to bring a piece of equipment in?"

"You have my permission to bring those cards in, revised or not. Nothing more."

"The Private deprives me of the use of evidence he himself assigned me to bring," Roan said stiffly.

"Do I now?" The beard, its lower end invisible under the privacy hood, was pulled thoughtfully. "Very well. But I should warn you—you have no leeway, young man. None!"

ROAN wheeled the box through the doorway. He was shaking with apprehension, but Granny's voice pleaded inaudibly, *Trust me.*

Even in front of his father, he nearly smiled. He locked the casters and, with a tremendous effort, heaved the box up on end. The right end, this time.

"What the devil's *that?*" demanded the beard.

"My evidence, Private." Outwardly calm, inwardly aquiver, he drew out the top section of the box with its two knobs and their two sets of horns. Each horn was hollow and had a light inside. Roan turned them on.

"I asked you a question," rumbled the Private.

"Your patience," Roan responded.

What patience? Granny's chuckle did more good for Roan than a week's delay.

"Ready now, Private. May I have the use of some small object —your stylus, perhaps, or a small book?"

"You have taken my money and you are taking my time. Is it now your intention to take my property?"

Whyncha spit in his eye?

Roan threw up a glance of such extreme annoyance that the inaudible voice apologized.

Sorry. It's just that I'm on your side, honey.

Honey! He had tasted his very first honey in his "dream." That was a nice thing to call someone. He wondered if anyone had ever thought of it before. To the Private, he said, "If I use my own property, there could be some suspicion of previous preparation."

"I suspect the previous preparation with which you are cluttering up my office already," growled the old man. "Here's the old paperweight. It dates from the time when buildings had sliding panels opening to the outside air. If anything happens to it—"

"It will do," said Roan levelly, taking it without thanks. The Private's eyebrow ridges moved briefly. "Would you kindly point out a spot on the floor?"

With an expression of saintly

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patience, the Private drew out his stylus and threw it. It fell near the far wall. Roan placed the paperweight near the point of the stylus, on the carpet.

"And one more indulgence. A point on your desk—somewhere with enough area to support that paperweight."

"Damn it, no! Go get those cards and we'll settle the matter in hand. I fail to see—"

Don't let him rant. Find your own spot and ask him if it suits him.

LIKE a man in a hailstorm, Roan advanced through the booming and shrieking syllables and pointed.

"Will this do?" he shouted, just loud enough to be heard over the storm.

The Private stopped just then and Roan's voice was like an airfoil crashing the sound barrier. Both men recoiled violently; to his own astonishment, Roan found that he recovered first. The old man was still sunk deep in his chair, the base of the beard quivering. In Roan's ear, Granny cackled.

Roan grasped the two horns protruding from one of the spheres on his machine and turned them so that the beam from each rested on the center of the paperweight.

"The production model would have other means of aiming," he explained as he worked. "This is for demonstration only." The other two beams were aimed at the indicated spot on the desk. "Ready now, Private."

"For what?" snarled the Private, then grunted as if he had swallowed a triple ration of roughage, for when Roan touched the control, there was a soft click and the paperweight appeared on the desk, exactly in the small pool of light from the beams. He put out a hand, hesitated, dropped back in his chair. "Again."

Roan threw the lever the other way. The paperweight lay quietly on the carpet. "For years, I have used every available minute on the research needed for this device and in building it. If the Private feels that the machine is of no use to this firm and the industry, that the time spent on it was wasted or stolen, then I shall be satisfied with his previously suggested—"

"Now come off it, son," said the beard. He rose and approached Roan, but kept his eyes glued on the machine in fascination. "You know the old man was just trying to throw a scare into you."

Got 'im!

"Could a large model be built?"

"Larger than a transplat," Roan said.

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"Have you built any larger than this?"

Tell him yes!

"Yes, Private."

Slowly the Private's eyes left the machine and traveled to Roan's face. Roan would have liked to retreat, but his back was against the wooden case.

Watch out!

"You feel this could be better than the transplat?"

Yes. Tell 'im yes—even if it hurts, tell im!

Roan found he could not speak. He tremblingly nodded his head.

"Hmm." The Private walked around the machine and back, though there was nothing to be seen. "Tell me," he said gently, "is this machine built on the same principle as the transplat?"

SWEAT broke out on Roan's brow. He wished he could wipe it off, but to raise his glove would have been a rudeness. He let it trickle.

"No," he whispered.

"You are telling me that this is a new kind of machine, better than the transplat!" When Roan neither moved nor spoke, the Private suddenly shouted, "Liar!"

Roan, white, dry-mouthed, with a great effort brought his eyes up to meet those of the livid Private. "A transplat can't do that," he said, nodding to the paperweight.

"You've got to be lying! If there was such a machine as this, you couldn't build it. You couldn't even conceive it! Where did you get it?"

Say you built it—quick!

"I built it," Roan breathed.

"I can't understand it," mumbled the Private.

Roan had never seen him so distressed and his curiosity got the better of his own tension. "What is it that you want me to say, Private?"

The Private swung around, face to face with his son. "You're holding something back. What is it?"

This is it! Now hold tight, honey. Tell him it works by PK.

Roan shook his head and set his lips, and the Private roared at him. "Are you refusing to answer me?"

Tell him, tell him about the PK. Tell him!

Roan had never felt so torn apart. There had to be more to this than he knew about. What was pushing him? What tied his tongue, knotted his stomach, swelled his throat?

Trust me, Roan. Trust me, no matter what.

IT broke him. He choked out, "This is only a direction-finder. It works by psychokinetic energy."

"By what? What?" The Priv-

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ate fairly bounced with eagerness.

"It's called PK. Mental power."

"Then it really isn't a machine at all!"

"Well—yes, you might say so. That's my theory, anyway." And where were the tied tongue, the aching throat? Gone!

"And you believe in that psycho-stuff?"

Roan found himself smiling. "It works."

"Why were you hiding it?'

"Would you have believed in such a thing, Private?"

"I confess I wouldn't."

"Well, then—I wanted to get it finished and tested, that's all."

"Then what?"

Give it to him. I mean it—give it to him!

"Why, it's yours. Ours. The company's. What else?"

The dry sound was the slow rubbing of gloved hands together. The other, which only Roan heard, was Granny's acid chuckle. *And he didn't even ask where the psychic operator was — notice? And he never will.*

The Private said, "Would you like to work with the Development Department on the thing?"

Sure, honey. I'll never let you down.

"Fine," Roan said.

"You'll never know—you can't know what this really means," said the Private. For a moment, Roan was sure he was going to clap him on the shoulder or some such unthinkable thing. "I can own up to a mistake. You should've been on the nuts-and-bolts end right from the start. Instead, I had you chasing inventories and consignments. Well, you've shown up the old man. From now on, your time's your own. You just work on anything around here that amuses you."

"I couldn't do that!"

Yes, by God, you could! snapped the voice in his ear. *And while he's soft, hit him again. Get your own home.*

His own home! With one of those PK machines, he could go anywhere, anytime. He could take Val—and find Flower again!

IX

IT was warm and windy and very dark. The village was asleep and only a handful of people sat around the great trestle table in the clearing. The stars watched them and the night-birds called.

"To get grim about it," said the old lady in a voice a good deal less than grim, "breaking up a culture isn't something you can do on an afternoon off. You've got to know where it's been and where it is, before you know where it's going. That takes a good deal of time. Then you have to decide how much it needs

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changing and, after that, whether or not you were right when you decided. Then it's a good idea to know for sure—but for *sure*—that you don't push it so far, it flops over some other gruesome way."

"But I was right all the same, wasn't I?" Roan insisted.

"Bless you, yes. You don't know how right."

"Then tell me."

"Some of it'll hurt."

"Don't hurt him," said Flower, half-seriously. Roan took her hand in the dark, feeling, as always, the indescribable flood within him brought by the simple touch of living flesh.

"Have to, honey," said Granny. "Blisters'll hurt him too, and his joints will ache at plowin' time, but in the long run he'll be all the better for it. Who's there?" she called.

A voice from the darkness answered, deep and happy, "Me, Granny. Prester."

"Hi, Granny," said Val. They came into the dim, warm glow of the hurricane lamp guttering on the table. Val was wearing a very short sleeveless tunic, which looked as if a spider had spun it. She and Prester moved arm in arm like a single being. Looking at her face, Roan felt dazzled. He squeezed Flower's hand and found her smiling.

"Sit down, kids. I want you to hear this, too. Roan, would you do something for me—something hard?"

"What is it?"

"Promise to shut up until I've finished, no matter what?"

"That's not hard."

"No, huh? All right, Flower, tell us all just exactly what psi powers you have."

Roan closed his eyes in delight, picturing again Flower's appearance in his cubicle, her birdlike flitting about the gateway during his dream, the cup she had drawn out of thin air for him. She said, "None that I know of, Granny."

"*What!*" he exploded.

GRANNY snapped, "You have promised to shut up!" To Flower, she went on, "And who's got the most psi potential in the place, far as we know?"

"Annie," said Flower.

"The fifteen-year-old I told you about," Granny explained to Roan. "The one who can knock over a straight-edge. Shut up! Let me finish!"

With a great effort, he subsided.

"In a way, we've lied to you," said Granny, "and, in a way, we haven't. I once told you some of what I've been thinking of—the new race of people that has to be along some day, if we let it—the next step up. I believe in

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them, Roan; call that a dream if you like. And when you had your dream those two days, we made the dream come true for a little while. We worked that thing out like a play — I had you in the frame of that new machine of mine all the time.

"It *is* a new machine, Roan, built on a new principle that the transplat boys never thought of. It's just what I told you it was—a stationless matter transmitter—no central, no depots, no platforms. I used it on every psi incident you witnessed in those two days. Believe me?"

"No!"

"Val?"

"I'd like to," she said diffidently. "But I've always thought—"

"There's no use being tactful about this," said Granny. "For the rest of your life, this is going to bother you, Roan, Val—and, later, a lot of other people we'll bring in. You'll rationalize it or you won't, but you'll never believe I have a new kind of machine. Shut *up,* Roan!

"You two and the rest of your generation are the first group to get really efficient crèche conditioning. You don't remember it, but ever since you were suckling babes, you've been forced into one or two basic convictions. Maybe we'll find a way to pry 'em loose from you. One of these convictions is that the transplat is the absolute peak of human technology—that there's only one way to make 'em and that there are only certain things they can do.

"You got it more than Val did, Roan, because you males in the transplat families were the ones who might be expected to develop such a machine. That's why, when this new one was built, *women* built it. Don't fight so, son! We have it, whether you believe it or not. We always will have it from now on. I'm sorry—it hurts you even to hear about it and I know what you went through when you had to sell it to your father. You damn near choked to death!"

ROAN breathed heavily, but did not speak. Flower put her arm across his shoulders.

"We had to do it to you, boy, we *had* to—you'll see why," said Granny, her old face pinched with worry and tenderness. "I'm coming to that part of it. Like I said, you don't break up a culture just all at once, boom. I wanted to change it, not wreck it. Stasis is the end product of a lot of history. Human beings had clobbered themselves up so much for so long, they developed what you might call a racial phobia against insecurity When they finally got the chance—the transplat—they locked themselves up

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tight with it. That isn't what the transplat was for, originally. It was supposed to disperse humanity over the globe again, after centuries of huddling. *Hah!*

"About the time they started deep conditioning in the crèches, walling each defenseless new generation off from new thoughts, new places, new ways of life, a few of us started to fear for humanity. Stasis was the first human culture to try to make new ideas impossible. I think it might have been humanity's first eternal culture. I really do. But I think it would also have been humanity's worst one.

"So along came Roan—the first of the deep-conditioned transplat executives, incapable of believing the service could be improved. There were—are—plenty more in other industries and we're going after 'em now, but transplat is the keystone. Roan, believe it or not, you were a menace. You had to be stopped. We couldn't have you heading the firm without introducing the new machine, yet if it weren't introduced in your generation, it never would.

"Your father is the last weak link, the last with the kind of imperfect conditioning that would let him even consider an innovation—remember your suggestion for eliminating freight operators? Only he would be unconditioned just enough to put our new machine into Development before realizing that, once in use, every cubicle in the whole human structure will suddenly be open to the sky. And it's all right—he can be trusted with it, because his 'decency' won't let him abuse privacy. *We'll* take care of that side of it!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that about him," said Roan miserably.

"I'm sorry, boy. Does it do any good to tell you that subservience and blind respect for your father are conditioned, too? I wish I could help you—you'll have that particular sore toe tramped on all your life. Anyway, enter Roan, just when we've perfected the new machine. There would have been no problem if we could have broken your conditioning against it, but the only alternatives seemed to be—either you'd see the machine operate and think you had lost your sanity, or you'd use your position in the firm to eliminate all trace of it."

HE objected, "But you were wrong both ways."

"That's because we discovered that the conditioning against any new transplat was against any new *machine*—any new *device*," Granny replied. "They'd never thought of matter transmission by a method *which was in no way a device!*

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"Can you see now why your father was so upset when he was faced with you and your pilot model? One of the props of his decent little universe was that the conditioning would stick—that of all people on Earth, you'd be the last to even think of a new machine, let alone build one. And when at last you came out with that gobbledegook about psychic power, he recognized the rationalization for what it was and felt safe again. Stasis was secure.

"I don't mind telling you that you made us jump the gun a bit. Our initial plan was to recruit carefully, just the way we did you. Dreams — unexpected and high-powered appeals to everything humanity has that Stasis is crushing. Then when there were enough of us wilderness people, maybe the gates would open. But ultimately we'd win—we have all nature and God Himself on our side.

"But you came along—what a candidate! You responded right down the line—so much so that, if we'd given you your head, you'd have dynamited Stasis and probably yourself and us along with it! And you took to that psi idea the way you took to the steak we planted in your nutrient that day, testing for food preference before the dream sequence. All of a sudden, you wanted to plant our machine spang in the middle of Stasis! It was chancy, but — well, you've seen what happened."

"Can I talk now?" Roan asked uncomfortably.

"Sure, boy."

"I'm not going to argue with you about the new machine—how it works, I mean. All you've done is give Stasis a more efficient machine. You can interfere with the new network, but you could do that anyway with the one you already had. So what's the big advantage?"

Granny chuckled. From a side pocket, she dug a white object and tossed it across the table. It left a powdery spoor as it rolled. "Know what that is?"

"Chalk?" asked Val.

"No, it isn't," Roan said. "It's Lunar pumice. I've seen a lot of that stuff."

"Well, you'll have to take my word for it," said Granny, "though I'll demonstrate any time you say—but I got that at 1430 this very afternoon—off the Moon, using only the machine you saw in the lab."

"Off the *Moon*!"

"Yup. That's the advantage of the new machine. The transplat operates inside a spherical gravitic field, canceling matter at certain points and recreating it at others—a closed system. But the new machine operates on paragravitic lines — straight lines of

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sub-spatial force which stretch from every mass in the Universe to every other. Mass canceled at one point on the line recurs at another point. Like the transplat, the new machine takes no time to cross any distance, because it doesn't actually cover distance.

"The range seems to be infinite —there's a limitation on range-finding, but it's a matter only of the distance between the two parts of the machine. I got the Moon easily with a forty-mile baseline. Put me a robot on the Moon and I can reach Mars. Set up a baseline between here and Mars and I can spit on Alpha Centauri. In other words, an open system."

THEY were silent as Roan raised his eyes and, for a dazzling moment, visualized the stars supporting a blazing network of lines stretching from each planet, each star, to all the others —a net that pulsed with the presence of a humanity unthinkably vast.

Prester murmured, "Anybody want to buy a good spaceship?"

"Why did you do it?" whispered Val, ever so softly, as if she were in a cathedral.

"You mean why couldn't I mind my own business and let the world happily dry up and blow away?" Granny chuckled. "I guess because I've always been too busy to sit still. No, I take that back. Say I did it because of my conscience."

"Conscience?"

"It was Granny who built the first transplat," Flower explained.

"And *you* were telling her what could and couldn't be done, Roan!" gasped Val.

"I still say—" he objected in irritation, and then he began to laugh. "I once took a politeness-present to Granny. Knitting. Something for the old folk to do while they watch the Sun sink."

They all laughed and Flower said, "Granny won't knit."

"Not for a while yet," Granny said, and grinned up at the sky.

—THEODORE STURGEON

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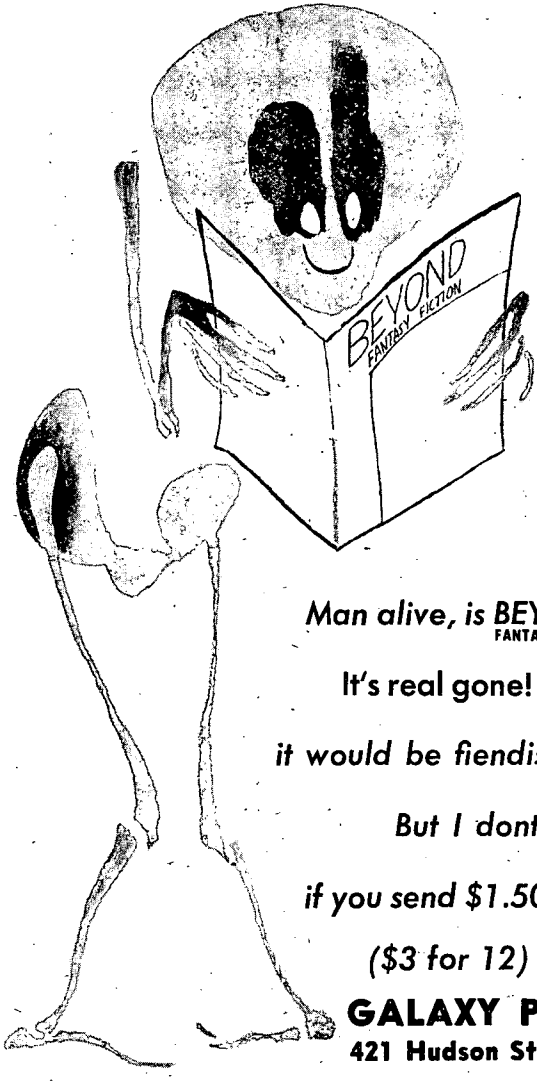

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Back to *Julie*

By RICHARD WILSON

The side-shuffle is no dance step. It's the choice between making time . . . and doing time!

YOU can't go shooting off to *that* dimension for peanuts. I don't want to give you the impression that peanuts are in short supply here, or that our economy is in the fix of having to import them sidewise. What I'm trying to convey is that, if you're one of the rare ones functionally equipped to do the side-shuffle, you ought to be well paid for it—in any coin.

That's what I told Krasnow. And he wasn't after peanuts. "I'll do it," I said, "if you'll make it worth my while."

"I'd hardly expect you to do it for nothing," he replied reproachfully. "How much do you want?"

I told him. The amount shook him up, but only briefly.

Illustrated by VIDMER

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"Okay," he said grudgingly. "I suppose I'll have to give it to you. But the stuff had better be good."

"Oh, it is," I assured him. "And you don't have to be afraid, because I couldn't possibly skip with the loot. I'll have to travel naked. I can't get there with so much as a sandal on one foot or a filling in a single tooth. Fortunately, my teeth are perfect."

Sweat poured off Krasnow's florid face as he worked the combination of his office safe. His fat jowls quivered unhappily around his cigar while he counted out the bills. Ten per cent was cash in advance, and the rest went into a bank account in my name. I paid off a batch of bills, then stripped and did my off-to-Buffalo.

"HONEST" John Krasnow was a crooked District Attorney who wanted to be Governor and then President. He had the Machine, but he didn't have the People. And, because he needed the People, he needed me. I had been to this other dimension—the one on the farthest branch of the time-tree—and I could give him what he wanted.

Krasnow found out about it after I was hauled up in front of him on a check-kiting charge. I'd had something of a reputation before I got into difficulties and, in trying to live up to the reputation, I had done some plain and fancy financing. Nothing that fifteen to twenty grand wouldn't have fixed—but while I scrounged around, trying to get cash, I kited a few checks. They pyramided me right into the D.A.'s office, where Krasnow was properly sympathetic.

"How," he asked, "could a man of your standing in the scientific world stoop so low?" It developed into quite a lecture and, even coming from Krasnow, it made me feel pretty low.

So I began explaining. I told him where I was born, and where I went to school, and where I had taken my sabbaticals — including this other dimension. And Krasnow believed me. I can't account for it, except possibly because he knew he was a crook and knew I wasn't one—exactly. Anyway, he believed me, and we made the deal and I did the side-shuffle, as agreed.

The journey to that other dimension is not a pleasant one. It does disturbing things to the stomach, and you see everything thin and elongated, as if you're sitting too far to the side in a movie theater.

I got there, however, and waited for the hiccups to subside. *Hiccupi laterali,* I had called them when I considered writing an article for the *Medical Journal* after my first trip. With the hiccupi gone, I stole some clothing—

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which was one of the riskiest parts of the program—and waited for morning. I didn't have any money, of course, so I had to hitchhike into town.

I could have stolen myself a better fit, but people aren't clothes-conscious in that dimension. They're more interested in what you are and what you can do. The driver of the car that gave me a lift asked, "And what is your field of endeavor?"

I told him, "I am able to eliminate the long wait in ivory production by accelerating the growth cycle of elephants."

He was deeply impressed and tipped me handsomely. I was less impressed with his talent for growing cobless corn, and therefore had to return only a small part of the sum he gave me.

The world of this dimension had developed some remarkable parallels to Earth. I mean our Earth, which falls into what I have designated Timeline One Point One, since it's the Earth with which I am most familiar. Every other world that has a language calls itself Earth, too. I had to visit briefly hundreds of the lateral worlds, hovering over primordial swamps, limitless oceans, insect kingdoms and radioactive planetoids, before I found the one that was truly parallel.

It existed in Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight, and it had refrigerators, platinum blondes, automobiles, airplanes, apple pie, tabloids, television, scotch and soda—just about everything we think makes life worthwhile. But it had its little differences, which was only to be expected in a timeline where the bionomics could create a new world each time someone changed his mind.

Thus, the cobless-corn man was driving what looked to me like a Chevrolet, but which was a Morton in his world. He let me off near a downtown restaurant where, thanks to our little exchange of talent talk, I had enough money for breakfast. It was considered unethical to swap talent talk outside the limits of certain rigidly defined groups, so I didn't try to out-impress the waitress.

FED, and filling my stolen clothes a bit better, I walked to the recorder's office and spent the rest of the morning looking up old documents. There was nothing there for Krasnow, as I had expected. But for me there was a very pretty file clerk. Talking to her, I verified my impression that human instincts and relationships were much the same in this dimension as in my own—except in the one basic respect that interested Krasnow, of course.

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The file clerk and I lunched together and then I spent the afternoon in the library. But I didn't find anything there, either, and then I had dinner with her. She said her name was Julie. I told her mine was Heck, for Hector, which it is. She thought this was "awfully cute" and we got along fine.

Julie had a delightful apartment and a matching sense of hospitality. The following day, when she went to work, I stayed home and washed the dishes and made the bed and used the telephone.

I ran up quite a bill with my long-distance calls, but I found out what I needed to know. I impressed a lot of people with my elephant story and pretended to be impressed hardly at all with what they told me they did—although often I was, very much.

The trouble with these people is that they no longer know how to lie, if that can be listed as trouble. I don't think it can. Neither did Krasnow, obviously. He'd never have sent me off on my expensive side-trip if he had.

Of course, Krasnow looked at it objectively. What he wanted from Timeline Seventeen Point Zero Eight was not for himself. It was for everybody else. He wanted the formula for the truth gas these people had developed long ago and loosed upon their world to put a stop to wars.

They had been in a bad way, although no worse than the sort of problem we were up against. Their trans-ocean squabbles and power politics seemed to have settled into a pattern of a war or two per generation. Just like us. Hence, the man who in-

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vented the truth gas became a global hero, after a certain amount of cynicism and skepticism. All the doubts vanished, naturally, once the gas got to working. And so did war.

You can't do much plotting and scheming if, every time you open your mouth to tell a lie, you stammer, sweat, turn red and gasp for breath. It's a dead giveaway. Nobody tries it more than once.

One or two men had tried to nullify the gas or work out a local antidote, either as a pure research project or through power-madness. But, because

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they had had to state their purposes as soon as they thought of them, they were put away. Neat. Very neat.

What I wanted was the formula for the truth gas. Its location wasn't exactly a secret in this land of complete candor, but it wasn't writ large on any wall for all to see, either. They kept it in their capital—located about where our Omaha is—on file among the Vital Statistics.

I took a superjet out there.

I HAD no trouble posing as a historian entitled to the facts. The gas didn't work on me, you see, because it was adjusted to the physiology of that timeline. There was just enough difference between us for it not to make me stick to the truth.

"We'll write out the formula for you," I was told obligingly. "But you'll have to sign the usual statement."

"Of course," I said. "Which one is that?"

"The one that says you won't publish it, and will destroy your copy when it has served your research purpose, without letting anyone else see it."

"Oh, *that* statement," I said.

I signed freely, told my elephant story and departed in an aura of good will.

The jet got me back that same evening. Julie fixed me up a snack, and we discussed how pretty she was and how nice I was.

I had everything Krasnow wanted now. I felt pretty good about it, because there was nobody else who could have done the job for him, and because it wasn't spying, really. Earth One Point One on the Timeline is world enough for Krasnow, I'm sure. Besides, dimensions don't have wars with one another. Too many things can go wrong.

Julie was lovely and I hated to leave the next morning, but it was my job. I told her, "I'm afraid I have to leave town for a bit, dear, but I'll be back very soon. Business, you know."

Being a Seventeen Point Zero Eight girl, Julie had no reason to doubt me. "Make it *very* soon," she whispered, her lips close to my ear.

So I came back, and now Krasnow has what he wants. He's delighted, as he should be. I've made up the gas for him and adjusted the formula so that it will work on people of our timeline. It's high-power stuff and a little will go a long way. I also made up an antidote for him. This was easy, since I could work on it without feeling any compulsion to tell everybody what I was doing and why.

Krasnow plans to release the truth gas just before the state

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convention. He'll be nominated, of course, and after November he'll be Governor. With everyone else compelled to tell the truth, it should be a cinch for him. He's a patient man, Honest John Krasnow is, and he's willing to wait four years for the Presidency.

I ought to be happy too. With the money Krasnow gave me, I've been living in the style to which I've always wanted to be accustomed. He has offered me a place on his staff and, somewhat superfluously, the use of his antidote. Naturally, the reason he was so magnanimous was that he doesn't want anyone else around who knows his gimmick and might have to tell the truth about it.

But I have had enough of this dimension now—now that Krasnow has what I promised him. He's going to use it tomorrow. And if I know Honest John—and I do—not even the Presidency will be big enough for him.

So I'm going back to Julie.

THERE are some obvious questions in your mind, I know, such as: Why did I get the formula for Krasnow, knowing there was no way for him to prosecute me while I was in Julie's dimension? And what made me come back?

In short—what was in it for me?

Let's call it research. Krasnow is a big-time operator; I've always been, you might say, in the peanut end of the game. He had a great deal to teach me and I, I'm happy to say, was an apt pupil. You might speculate on what's in it for you, because, if you ask me, anybody who can do the side-shuffle should do it before Krasnow becomes President.

However, don't go to Seventeen Point Zero Eight unless you want to swap one Krasnow for another. The fact is that I've learned I can be one in Julie's dimension. After all, their formula doesn't work on me—but I can assure you that it will work on you.

And that elephant story I told on my last visit is, as I've indicated, in the peanut category. All Krasnow has is a country. I'll have a whole world.

There's nothing like study under a master, is there?

I should be back to Julie by midnight if I start now.

—RICHARD WILSON

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Murt's Virus was catastrophically lethal, but it killed in a way no disease had ever thought of—it loved its victims to death!

mate in two moves

By WINSTON MARKS

Illustrated by ASHMAN

LOVE came somewhat late to Dr. Sylvester Murt. In fact, it took the epidemic of 1961 to break down his resistance. A great many people fell in love that year—just about every other person you talked to—so no one thought much about Dr. Murt's particular distress, except a fellow victim who was

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directly involved in this case.

High Dawn Hospital, where 38-year-old Dr. Murt was resident pathologist, was not the first medical institution to take note of the "plague." The symptoms first came to the attention of the general practitioners, then to the little clinics where the G. P.s sent their patients. But long before anything medical was done about it, the plague was sweeping North and South America and infiltrating every continent and island in the world.

Murt's assistant, Dr. Phyllis Sutton, spotted the first irregularity in the *Times* one morning and mentioned it to him. They were having coffee in Murt's private office-lab, after completing reports on two rush biopsies.

She looked up from the editorial page and remarked, "You know, someone should do a research on the pathology of pantie raids."

MURT spooned sugar into his mug of coffee and stared at her. In their six months' association, it was the first facetious remark she had made in his presence. To this moment, he had held an increasing regard for her quiet efficiency, sobriety, professional dignity and decorum. True, she wore her white coat more tightly belted than was necessary and, likewise, she refused to wear the very low hospital heels that thickened feminine ankles. But she wore a minimum of come-hither in both her cosmetic and personality makeup. This startling remark, then, was most unexpected.

"Pantie raids?" he inquired. "Whatever would justify an inquiry into such a patently behavioristic problem?"

"The epidemic nature and its increasing virulence," she replied soberly. "This spring, the thing has gotten out of hand, according to this editorial. A harmless tradition at a few of the more uninhibited campuses has turned into a national collegiate phenomenon. And now secondary effects are turning up. Instructors say that intramural romance is turning the halls of ivy into amatory rendezvous."

Murt sipped his coffee and said, "Be thankful you aren't a psychiatrist. Bacterial mutations are enough of a problem, without pondering unpredictable emotional disturbances."

His assistant pursued it further. "It says the classrooms are emptying into the marriage bureaus, and graduation exercises this year will be a mockery if something isn't done. What's more, statistics show a startling increase in marriages at the high school level."

Murt shrugged broad shoulders

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that were slightly bent from long hours over a microscope. "Then be thankful you aren't an overworked obstetrician," he offered as an amendment.

She glanced up from the paper, with annoyance showing in her dark, well-spaced eyes. "Is it of no interest to you that several hundred thousand youngsters are leaving high school and college prematurely because they can't control their glands?"

"Be glad, then," Murt said coldly, "that you aren't an endocrinologist — now drink your coffee. I hear the microtome working. We'll have some business in a minute."

Dr. Phyllis Sutton rustled the pages of the *Times* together, folded it up and threw it at the wastebasket with more vigor than was necessary. The subject was momentarily closed.

HIS staff position at High Dawn paid less, but the life suited Dr. Murt better than the hectic, though lucrative, private practices of many of his colleagues. He arrived at the hospital early, seven o'clock each day, to be on hand for quick tissue examinations during the morning operations. By ten, the biopsies were usually out of the way, and he spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon checking material from the bacteriology section and studying post-operative dissections of tumorous tissues and organs removed in surgery.

It was engrossing, important work, and it could be accomplished in a normal work-day, leaving the pathologist considerable leisure to study, read and relax. Shortly after the pantie-raid conversation with Phyllis Sutton, he found the evening paper attracting more than his usual quick perusal.

This emotional fuss in the young human animal was beginning to preoccupy the newspaper world. Writers were raising their eyebrows and a new crop of metaphors at the statistics, which they described variously as alarming, encouraging, disheartening, provocative, distressing, romantic or revolting, depending upon the mood and point of view.

As June, the traditional mating month, wore into July, national statistics were assembled to reveal that marriages were occurring at almost double the highest previous rate, that the trend was accelerating rather than diminishing.

Jewelers and wholesale diamond merchants chalked up fabulous increases in the sale of engagement and wedding settings. Clergymen and qualified public officials were swamped

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with requests for religious and civil marriage ceremonies.

Parks, beaches and drive-in theaters were jammed with mooning and/or honeymooning couples, and amusement parks began expanding their overpatronized tunnel-of-love facilities.

The boom in houses, furniture, appliances and TV was on, and last year's glut of consumer goods for the home was rapidly turning into a shortage.

All was not good news, however. The divorce courts reported their calendars stacked months ahead of time, and an increasing number of lurid headlines were devoted to the love-triangular troubles of the rich, famous and notorious. Love-nest exposés and bigamous marriages rocketed in number.

The whole world, adolescent and adult, was falling in love, with the inevitable unrequited infatuations, the jealousies, infidelities and the bitter-sweetness of wholesale, illicit, impossible love situations in which vulnerable people found themselves increasing astronomically.

Writers of popular newspaper psychology columns attributed the rampaging emotional fire to everything from mass-hysteria, caused by sunspots, to the paternalism of a government that gave increased income-tax deductions to married people.

DR. Murt's growing interest was not entirely academic. His bachelorhood was no accident of fate, but rather a carefully contrived independence, for which he paid the price of eternal vigilance. As the world supply of eligible bachelors diminished sharply, his wariness increased, and he became more and more curt with nurses and female technicians at the hospital.

He revealed the depth of his leeriness one afternoon at the scrub-up sink, where he and his assistant were washing after a messy dissection. Phyllis Sutton remarked, "Holly, down in Personnel, showed me a tabulation she ran off for her own curiosity today, Doctor. Do you realize that in this whole hospital there are only *eight* unmarried female employees?"

Murt threw water droplets from his bare arms and muttered, "Yes, and every one of them's giving me the eye—to say nothing of half the married ones."

His aide dried her long arms and slender hands and looked at him with a crooked smile. "Not to underestimate your good looks, Doctor, but I am one of the unmarried females. I trust I'm not giving you too much trouble?"

He looked up, startled. "Yes—no, *no*—of course not. I'm referring to the nurses and the tech-

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nicians. What's got into them? The whole lot seems to be on the make!"

Phyllis combed out her short dark hair and looked at him in the mirror. "I assure you the males are just as bad. These interns and four of the male nurses give me a physical with their eyes every time I happen to meet them."

"I suppose this ties in somehow with your pantie-raid theory."

"Well, what do *you* think?"

"I don't think. I just dodge. You'd do well to do the same," Murt told her, putting on his jacket and adjusting his tie.

She sat down in his oak swivel-chair and crossed her slender ankles. "Are you aware of the problem they have downstairs in the out-patient clinic?"

"Hadn't heard," Murt said.

SHE removed a file from her purse and touched up her short nails. "The outlying clinics are sending their overflow to us. They can't seem to diagnose the odd symptoms they're getting."

"I had noticed the large number of negative test results coming out of the lab," Murt acknowledged. "Haven't followed any of them through, though."

"I have," Phyllis said with a little frown. "Seems to be a psychosomatic nightmare down there."

"What are the symptoms?"

"Mostly neurotic," she said. "Listlessness, loss of appetite, palpitations, cold sweats and absent-mindedness."

"Why don't they go to the psychiatric clinics?"

"Overloaded. They're sending patients here."

"What age groups?"

"From puberty to senility. I'd like your permission to do a little special work on blood samples."

"Another theory?" he asked caustically.

"Yes. Will you give me your permission to test it?"

Murt adjusted his Panama straw in the mirror and noticed that the nostrils of his straight nose were flared for some reason. "Your time is your own after three P. M. every day. If you want to take time out from your thesis research, that's your business."

He crossed to the door and was opening it when he became aware that he had had no answer. He looked back at the profile of his assistant's body, which was now stretched out full length, suspended at three points—her higher-than-practical heels on the linoleum tile, her spine and curved hips using only an inch of the chair's edge, and her head tilted over the chair's back. She inhaled from a king-size filter-tip cigar-

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ette and blew a feather of smoke at the ceiling.

"*Yuh!*" she said finally. Her flat abdomen jumped at the exhaled syllable, and so did her generous breasts under the soft emerald-green street dress.

"Good *night!*" Murt closed the door behind him quickly and became aware of a sharp stab of what he defined as pure rut—the first he had suffered in fifteen years.

II

HE taxied downtown to the athletic club, where he maintained his three-room apartment. The 20-story building was a citadel of masculinity—no females allowed—and recently it was an especial relief to enter the lobby and leave behind the world of turbulently mixed sexes.

The small but lush entry chamber had a deserted air about it this afternoon. At the room desk, Crumbley, the clerk, handed him his key with a pallid hand and returned to sigh over a colored picture in *Esquire*—it was the "fold-out" page, featuring a gorgeous blonde reclining at full length. Crumbley's expression, however, was far from the loose-lipped, lecherous leer that he normally exposed to such art. His eyes had a thin glaze over them, he breathed shallowly and, if Dr. Murt had not known the little man's cynically promiscuous nature so well, he'd have sworn Crumbley was in love.

Upstairs, Murt donned rubber-soled gym shoes and sweat clothes and rode the elevator back down to the gymnasium. Three times a week, he put his muscles through the whole routine—work on the bars, rings, the leather horse, the rope climb and a twenty-lap jog around the balcony racetrack. Afterward, he showered, took a dip in the swimming pool and retired to the health service department for a rubdown and some sunlamp.

Throughout the whole routine, he encountered not a single other member. While Charlie, the husky blond masseur, hammered and kneaded his muscles, Murt reflected on the abating interest in athletics at the club.

"Are we losing members, Charlie?" he asked.

"You'd think so from how dead it is up here," Charlie replied. "But Crumbley says we aren't. The guys just aren't exercising. Can't figure it, Doc. Even with the usual summer slump, it's never been this slow."

When he had absorbed all the punishment he could stand, Murt rolled off, went into the ultraviolet room, set an alarm clock and lay down by himself on one of the paper-covered tables. He

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adjusted the dark goggles and reflected thankfully that he didn't have to go to the beach for his sun and have sand kicked in his face by a procession of predatory females, ogling his long limbs and trying to attract his attention.

The clean smell of ozone was pleasant, the warmth of the lamps relaxed him, and he dozed off. He dreamed that he heard someone else come in and lie down on the next table and, when he raised his head to see who it was, was amazed to discover his assistant, Dr. Phyllis Sutton, stretched out like himself, wearing only shower-sandals and goggles.

The alarm clock wakened him from the disturbing dream. He was sweating profusely and took another shower, using the cold water at full needle force to dispel his shock at his subconscious.

WRAPPING the robe around him, Murt returned to his apartment to dress for dinner. As he snapped the paper laundry band off a clean shirt, he caught himself wondering how old Phyllis Sutton was. Twenty-eight? Thirty? She appeared younger, but she was in her last year of residence to gain her specialty of pathology. That meant over eleven years of school and practice. She was a lovely creature, but she was no child.

He had half an impulse to phone her for dinner, then became lost in studying his own reaction to the thought. Pulse over a hundred, respiration quickening, irregular. There was a tensing of the abdomen, a faint burning in the pit of his stomach.

He remembered the urge at the office, the dream in the sunroom, the sudden sweat that had required five minutes under the cold needle shower.

After so many years of deliberate, scholarly celibacy, what was happening to him?

He stared at the phone. With six motions of one finger, he could dial Phyllis Sutton's face into view, and suddenly he yearned to do that very ridiculous thing.

After staring at her, off and on, for the six months since she had transferred to High Dawn to complete her residency, now he wanted to see her face outside of working hours for some inexplicable reason.

Call her up, date her, take her dancing, proposition her — get this silly feeling off your chest!

Suppose she was busy or refused to go out with him? Suppose she already had a boy friend?

This last thought deepened the burn in the pit of his stomach,

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and he finished dressing listlessly. To hell with it! This was poker night. If he did succeed in dating his assistant, they'd inevitably talk shop. That was why he enjoyed a night of cards with his six non-medical brother clubmen, once a week. It was refreshing to break away from the professional point of view.

No, he wouldn't sacrifice that for any woman.

HE ate alone, read the paper, joined the poker party at seven o'clock, played six hands of stud, cashed in his chips and returned to his room. In a mood of deep irritation, he found Phyllis Sutton's home phone number and rang it four times with no result.

He thought to try the hospital. She answered from the lab extension on audio only, but her voice and its frankly curious tone sent vertically polarized chills through him.

"I—I wanted to apologize for my rudeness this afternoon," he said with difficulty from a suddenly dry mouth.

There was a brief silence. "Have you been drinking, Dr. Murt?" He noticed that she did not call him Sylvester. Why was he so damned thirsty for some little sign of warmth and friendliness from her?

He cleared his throat. "No, I'm serious. It occurred to me that your interest in the out-clinic problem was commendable, and that I was rather short in my remarks to you."

"Oh! I take it I have your permission to work my project in during the day, then?"

"That's right, so long as it doesn't interfere with the routine." He sounded stuffy to himself, but he was entirely out of practice in speaking to please a female.

"Thanks," she said wryly, and the conversation ended.

Somehow, the brief talk with her restored his perspective. Once again she was his assistant, and the significance of her as a woman faded. She was a dedicated physician like himself. In another few years, she would find a residency of her own. She had no more inclination to knock off and become a woman than he had to squander his time and energy on attaining the status of family man.

IT was with mounting admiration that he followed her new project in examining blood samples. As they came up from the clinic, she sorted the specimen tubes at once, putting a tiny snip of yellow Scotch tape under the label of each sample that belonged to a patient with the new undiagnosed disorder.

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Then, after the requested hemoglobin, blood sugar and other standard tests had been run, she retrieved the samples from the technicians, grouped them in a special rack and devoted every spare minute to further examination.

She centrifuged, precipitated, filtered and stained over and over, using every qualitative procedure in the book. Murt signed her requisitions for exotic reagents and rare stains. He helped her balance out the large centrifuge to get the maximum r.p.m. from it. He let her use the most costly of the fine-porosity filters.

He had little hope of success, but it was good practice for her. She was required to identify every organism she found, bone up on its known effects, then determine that it could not cause the symptoms reported.

She did all this without impairing her usefulness to Murt. When he needed her, she was at his side, dissecting, taking down notes, preparing delicate sections and checking slides before they came to him.

In several weeks, she exhausted all known tests on the first samples. After lunch one day, she turned her palms up. "*Nichts da!*" she said, pulling a mashed cigarette from the huge pocket of her white smock.

He glanced at her and swiveled to stare out the window. It was part of his tight campaign to prevent a disastrous recurrence of the emotional tempest he had suffered the day she had begun this research.

"It was a nice brush-up on your bacteriology," he said. "Have you saved the filtrates?"

"Yes, of course. Did I overlook anything?"

"Nothing that we could do here, but there's an electron microscope downtown at Ebert Industrial Labs. How about photomicrography? Could be a filtrable virus."

He knew that she was aware of the possibility, and also that she was reluctant to ask him for additional funds to go into a virus hunt with the expensive piece of equipment.

"Wonderful!" she told him. "I did hate to ask you, but it would be a shame to waste all that immaculate filtrate."

III

A WEEK passed, during which a bulletin from the Government Health Service announced official suspicion that the human race was suffering a mysterious, pandemic affliction which was as yet undiagnosed. Although the symptoms, as reported by hundreds of clinics, were relatively mild, the effect on the nation's

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economy was growing serious.

Industry and business reported unprecedented absenteeism. Factory supervisors and insurance companies were frantic over the upsurge in accidents. It was estimated that almost fifty per cent of the population exhibited the symptoms of depression, absent-mindedness, insomnia and loss of appetite.

Negligent driving was increasing the highway toll sharply. Educational institutions reported classroom discipline rapidly vanishing. Armed forces headquarters cautiously admitted a new high in desertions and AWOLs.

The consensus among psychiatrists and psychologists was that the condition stemmed from pathogenic causes.

Dr. Murt raised his eyebrows when he read this. Perhaps Phyllis Sutton was right, after all.

The bulletin continued, "All clinical pathologists are requested to be alert to the presence of any unusual organisms discovered in body fluids or tissues examined. Please report your findings to the U. S. Public Health Service."

Murt found Phyllis Sutton at the microtome, finishing a wax section, and showed her the bulletin.

"Score one for woman's intuition," he smiled. "Federal Health Service tends to agree with your theory."

"Now I *am* eager to see those pictures," she said.

LESS than two hours later, a messenger brought the photomicrographs, and the two pathologists bent over them together. Phyllis had submitted eighteen samples, six of which were controls taken from healthy, unafflicted subjects. Per her instructions, smears of the specimens in various degrees of dilution had been photographed through the great electron microscope.

Murt muttered to himself as they compared the controls with the "infected specimens." The "healthy" samples were relatively clear, except for minute protein matter. Conversely, all twelve suspect specimens swarmed with shadowy six-sided dots.

Phyllis' eyes widened. "There *is* something there! Do you suppose it could be the Love Bug?"

"Love Bug?"

"Certainly. That bulletin didn't go into the psychologists' findings. The diagnosticians downstairs say that the symptoms appear to be no more than complaints of the lovesick."

"Are you back on the pantie-raid theme again?"

"I've never been off it," she replied. "From the first, I've had a notion that some organism was increasing glandular activity. Ex-

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cess emotionalism often originates in overstimulated glands."

"Of course, but mental attitudes can trigger the glands, and they are interacting. How do you separate the effects? How could you guess that an organism was responsible?"

She shrugged. "It was a possibility within our specialty, so I set out to prove or disprove it. From the appearance of these photographs, I don't think we have *disproved* it."

It was a properly cautious statement that pleased Murt. They were a long way from proving that their newly discovered virus was the culprit, but the research had definitely produced a question mark.

Murt ordered copies of the photomicrographs from Ebert Industrial Labs and arranged for a complete dossier to be forwarded to the U. S. Health Service.

That night, he was startled by a headline and lead story that quoted the government bulletin. The science editor had a field day, tying in speculation that "Doctors Suspect Love Bug Epidemic."

THE next day, three reporters called upon him, each with the same query. "It's rumored that you are doing research on the Love Bug, Dr. Murt. Anything to report?"

He shooed them out angrily, after learning that someone at Ebert Labs had given them the tip. Phyllis smiled at him as he slammed the door after the last reporter.

"You still discount the Love-Bug idea, don't you?" she asked.

"I dislike sensationalism in a matter like this," he said. "Even if their assumptions were true, I wouldn't like it."

"You can't blame the papers. They're starved for some explanation. I pity your passion for anonymity if your virus proves to be the causative factor."

"*My* virus?"

"Certainly. The whole project is under your auspices and direction."

"See here, Phyl, *you* did the work."

"Don't you dare mention my name," she said. "You're my superior and senior pathologist and it's your duty to protect me against the press. I don't want columnists popping out of my bathroom any more than you do."

Murt gave up. "The argument is entirely anticipatory," he pointed out. "The virus might turn out to be a batch of dormant German measles. Would you consider having dinner with me tonight?"

"Why?" She shot the question back at him like a rebounding

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tennis ball. "Answer that first!"

Murt opened his mouth. He could not recall ever hearing such a rude rejoinder to an invitation to dinner. Not that there had been a plethora of amenities between them, but this was unthinkable! The question was, why *should* she have dinner with him? Give her eight good reasons. What was his motive in asking her? In one word, *why?*

Murt searched her face, but only a quiet interest showed in her expression.

"Why does any man invite any woman to dinner?" he countered.

"You aren't *any* man, Dr. Murt. Nor am I *any* woman. I want your specific reason for inviting me to dinner. Is it to discuss professional matters or—what?"

"Good Lord, Dr. Sutton!" He followed her lead in using the formal address. "Man is a social animal! I would enjoy your company at dinner, that's all. At least, I thought I would."

She looked at him unrelentingly. "If the talk will be about baseball, books or billiards, I'm for it. If it's to be moonlight, roses and dimmed lights—no sale."

IT was like asking one's grandfather for a date. His regard for her highly professional approach turned to resentment. After all, she was a woman, a woman who persisted in belting her smock too tightly and wearing sheer nylons. Why this absurd revulsion at his casual acknowledgment of her sex?

He almost withdrew the invitation, but changed his mind at the last moment. "You name the place and the subject for conversation."

She nodded. "Very well, I'll pick you up at seven."

He had his date—with an emancipated female, and she didn't let him forget it during the whole meal. The restaurant she picked was expensive, but about as romantic as a bus depot. She ordered beer instead of a cocktail, toyed wordlessly with a $5.00 steak, and argued over the check.

Only as they were preparing to leave did she betray a sign of femininity. A platinum blonde, two tables away, had been eying Murt. Suddenly, she lurched to her feet without a word to her escort, staggered over to the pathologist, slurred, "You're what I've b'n lookin' for all m'life," and planted a wet alcoholic kiss on his mouth before he could defend himself.

Her escort peeled her away with sad-eyed apologies. There was no jealousy or anger in his face, only a deep hurt. "She—she isn't well, I think," he said.

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"You know, this new—whatever it is that's going around."

Murt wiped off the lipstick and looked at Phyllis, expecting to find at best sardonic amusement, but she seemed pale and annoyed.

"I'm sorry I brought you here," she said.

"Think nothing of it," Murt told her. "You heard the man. This is what's going around. Do you think I'll catch it?"

Phyllis wasn't amused. She did let him ride the taxi to her apartment, but bade him a terse goodby at the door.

Except for the incident of the blonde and Phyl's reaction, the evening had been a bust. Murt wondered how he had ever visualized her as a warm-blooded, responsive female. He smiled at the evening of torment she had once given him.

She was entirely frigid or else so leery of men that she might as well have been one herself.

IV

THE following morning, he presided at a specialists' conference at the hospital, during which he revealed the results of the blood research. They had all read the Health Service bulletin and were sharply interested in the photomicrographs.

When the meeting was over, Feldman, the bacteriologist, and Stitchell, an endocrinologist, volunteered to work with Murt. They gave Phyllis' "gland-irritation" theory more credence than Murt. He outlined a program. Both agreed to take the problem back to their own departments.

The conference set Murt behind in his work and he spoke scarcely five words to his assistant until he was ready to leave. As he finished scrubbing up, she handed him an early edition of the *Times*.

"Local Doctor Isolates Love Bug!" The story was sketchy and not half so positive as the headline, but it did name him and High Dawn Hospital, and described the new virus.

He stared at Phyllis Sutton. "Did you—"

"Of course not. The reporters were here, but I sent them away. I told them we were medicine men, not tobacco men."

"Your name isn't even mentioned," he said suspiciously.

"You signed the report to the Health Service," she pointed out. "The leak probably came at that end." She put her hand on his arm. "It wasn't your fault."

His fury cooled as he noted her gesture. Then she realized that he was looking down at her hand and withdrew it quickly.

The next few days were blindly busy. A note from the govern-

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ment acknowledged receipt of his report and pictures, and was followed by a message that the virus could not be identified. The implication was that there was a strong possibility that it was the causative factor in the new *malaise*.

MURT devoted more attention to the joint laboratory work on the virus. The newspapers continued to come up with confidential information they shouldn't have had, and they dubbed the Love Bug, *Murt's Virus*. The name stuck, and the pathologist found himself famous overnight.

Phyllis continued to force all the credit upon him, on threat of transferring out if he violated her confidence. Except for the nuisance of dodging reporters, the accolade was not entirely unpleasant.

His pictures—old ones, Lord knew where they had dug them up—began appearing in the papers. Instead of reproving him, the hospital board voted him a substantial salary increase and gave him a free hand in directing the research. A government grant was obtained to supplement his budget, and the work picked up speed.

Necessarily, the lead that Phyllis Sutton's early research had given them on the rest of the medical world was maintained largely because of the time lag in disseminating the information contained in Murt's report, and the additional time it took for other clinical laboratories to confirm it.

Cages of experimental animals began arriving along with several additional specialists. Ebert Industrial Labs, contrite over the original information leak, made available their electron microscope, and Murt assigned the new toxicologist to work over there with Feldman, the bacteriologist, studying ways to weaken or destroy the virus.

Stitchell, the endocrinologist, and a trio of psychologists from the State University began injecting monkeys with virus when Feldman found he could propagate it in sterile medium.

On September 12, 1961, Dr. Sylvester Murt became a victim of the virus which bore his name.

HE had slept poorly and he awakened feeling empty. His first dismal thought was that Phyl wouldn't be at the hospital this morning. He had told her to spend a few hours down at Ebert Labs, getting notes on their progress.

As he shaved, dressed and breakfasted, this thought preyed on his mind. It wasn't until he had put in half the morning clock-watching and door-gazing

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that he stepped outside his wretchedness and took an objective look at his feelings.

It wasn't that he missed her help—he had plenty of personnel at his disposal now. He simply longed for the sight of her, for the sound of her voice and her heels clipping busily around his office-lab.

Here we go again, he thought, and then he came up short. The feeling was similar to the silly evening of infatuation he had allowed himself, but it was intensified tenfold. The burn in his stomach was almost painful. He caught himself sighing like a frustrated poet, and he grew to hate the sight of the hall door, through which she kept right on not appearing.

When she failed to show up by 11:30, and he gagged over his lunch, he knew he was sick.

He had Murt's Virus!

Now what? Did knowing you had it make it any easier? Easier to make a damned fool of himself, he supposed. He'd have to take hold of himself or he'd scare her off the grounds.

At the thought of her leaving him for good, something like a dull crosscut saw hacked across his diaphragm, and he dropped his forkful of potato salad.

Back at his office, he diluted 30 cc of pure grain alcohol with water and swallowed it. Some of the distress and anxiety symptoms were relieved, and he bent determinedly to his work.

When her distinctive steps finally came through the door, he refused to raise his head from the binocular microscope. "How are they making out over there?" he mumbled.

"It's slow," she said, dropping her notes on his desk. "They're halfway through the sulfas so far. No results yet."

RELIEF at having her near him again was so great, it was almost frightening. But he gained equal pleasure from finding his self-control adequate to keep from raising his head and devouring her with his eyes.

"Sylvester," her voice came from behind his stool, "if you don't mind, I'd rather not go over there again."

"Why not?"

Her voice was strangely soft. "Because I—I missed . . ."

At that instant, her hand rested on his shoulder and it sent a charge of high voltage through him. He stiffened.

"*Don't do that!*" he said sharply.

He could see her reflection dimly in the window glass. She took a step backward. "What's the matter, Sylvester?"

He fought back the confusion in his brain, considered explain-

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ing that he was making a fine adjustment on the scope. But he didn't. He turned and let her have it. "Because I've got the virus," he said in a flat voice. "And the object of my affection —or infected, overstimulated glands—is *you*!"

"Oh, dear! That blonde at the restaurant . . ." Phyl's face was pale, but she composed her features quickly. "Do you want me to leave?"

"Lord no! That magnifies the symptoms. Stay with me and—and just be yourself. I won't bother you. If I lay a finger on you, clobber me."

"Have you had your blood tested?"

"I don't have to. I've got all the symp—"

He broke off, realizing that he was taking for granted that the new virus *was* the cause of his feeling. Clinically, this was nowhere near proved yet. Slowly he rolled up his sleeve above the elbow. He dipped a swatch of gauze in alcohol and swabbed a vein.

"All right, Phyl, you're the doctor. Make with the syringe."

BY nightfall, Murt came to understand the reasons for the increase in industrial accidents, absenteeism and the rest of the social effects of the "mild" epidemic. Phyllis Sutton was in his mind constantly. He deliberately did not look at her. But he was aware of her every movement, the texture and shape of her hand when she handed him a slide, the scent of her powder, the sound of her heels.

When she left the room, he found himself awaiting her return and conjecturing on what she was doing every moment. Not that it was difficult to adjust his behavior—no, that was relatively easy. All he had to do was think about every remark he made to her, censoring word, inflection and tone of voice—and, by keeping his back to her, it was easy to prevent his eyes from darting glances at her profile and staring at the curve of her hip below the tight belt.

By staying busy, he fought off the depression until he left for the club, when it closed in on him like an autumn fog. He stopped at the club bar.

Curly, the bald-headed bartender, eyed him curiously when he ordered a double Scotch.

"Heavy going down at the hospital these days?" Curly asked.

Murt envied him his relaxed, carefree expression. He nodded. "Pretty busy. I suppose you're catching it, too. Lot of people drowning their sorrows these days?"

Curly looked up at the clock. "You said it! In about a half

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hour, the place'll be loaded. This epidemic is going to run the distilleries dry if it doesn't end pretty soon."

"Does liquor help any?"

"Seems to—a little. It's the damnedest thing! Everybody's in love with the wrong people—I mean ten times as bad as usual. Of course, not everybody. Take my wife—she's got it bad, but she's still in love with *me*. So it could be worse."

"WHAT do you mean?" Murt asked, raising his head.

"I mean it's bad enough for the poor woman to have the guy she wants. It's the jealousy angle. Every minute I'm away, she sits at home wondering if I'm faithful. Calls me up six times a shift. I don't dare take her out anyplace. Every time another female comes in sight, she starts worrying. Kate's a damned good wife, always has been, or I wouldn't be putting up with it. That's what's happening to a lot of marriages. Some guys get fed up and start looking around. About that time, the bug bites *them* and look out, secretary!"

"But it's not her fault," Murt said emphatically.

"I know," Curly shrugged. "A lot of people don't make any allowances for it, though. You know Peter, the elevator boy? He and his wife both got it. For a while it was okay, but I guess they finally drove themselves nuts, keeping tabs on each other. Now they can't stand to be together and they can't stand to be apart. Poor joker ran the cage past the basement limit-switch three times today and had to be bailed out of the shaft. Mr. Johnson said he'd fire him if he could get another boy."

The implication was shocking to Murt. He had supposed that unhappiness would stem principally from cases of unrequited love, such as his own, but it was apparent that the disease magnified the painful aspects of mutual love as well. Over-possessiveness and jealousy were common reefs of marriage, so it was hardly illogical that the divorce courts were as busy as the marriage license bureaus, after all.

IT helped a little to immerse himself in the troubles of others, but, after another double Scotch, he went to his apartment and immediately fell into despondency. The desire to phone Phyllis was almost overpowering, though he knew talking to her wouldn't help. Instead, he dressed and went to dinner. The club boasted a fine chef, but the food tasted like mucilage.

Later, he went to the bar and drank excessively. Yet he had to take a sedative to get to sleep.

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He awoke in a stupor at ten o'clock. His phone was jangling persistently. It was Phyllis Sutton, and her face showed sharp concern.

"Are you all right, Sylvester?"

For a moment his hangover dominated, but then it all came back. "Good morning! I'm *great*!" he moaned.

"Stitchell and the new toxicologist think they have something to report," she said.

"So do I. Alcohol is positively not the answer."

"This is important. Your suggestion on the sulfa series seems to have paid off."

"I'll be right over," he said, "as soon as I amputate my head."

"Come down to the zoo. I'll be there."

The thought of a remedy that might relieve him was a fair hangover cure. He dressed quickly and even managed to swallow a little coffee and toast.

V

AT the hospital, he went directly to the "zoo" in the basement. A knot of personnel, including Phyllis, Peterson, the toxicologist, and Feldman, opened to admit him to the cage under their inspection. A quick glance at the control cages showed no change in the undoctored monkeys. Males and females were paired off, huddling together miserably, chittering and sadly rubbing their heads together. Each couple eyed the other couples suspiciously. Even here, the overpossessiveness was evident, and Murt cringed from the pitiful, disconsolate expressions.

The cage before him, however, appeared normally animated. The monks were feeding and playing happily. Feldman was grinning. "Had to try a new derivative, Sylvester, but the sulfa series was the right approach."

Murt stared at the cage, red-eyed. "Hadn't realized you succeeded in producing the symptoms in monkeys."

Phyllis said, "Why, I gave you that report yester—" She broke off with an understanding glance.

Peterson was exclaiming, "I never saw such a rapid-acting remedy! And so far, there's no evidence of toxic effect."

"It must absorb directly into the gland tissue," Feldman added. "Hardly had time to materially reduce the virus content significantly."

Murt murmured words of congratulations to them, turned on his heel and stalked out. Phyllis followed him to his office.

"Get me some of the stuff and notes on the dosages they administered," he ordered.

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"Certainly," she said. "But why didn't you ask—*Dr. Murt, you aren't going to try it on yourself?*"

"Why not?" he barked hoarsely.

"It'll be weeks before we can determine if it's safe," she protested, horrified.

"We haven't got weeks. People are falling apart. This thing's contagious."

Even while Murt said it, he felt it was the wrong approach. He knew his own perspective was shot, but Phyllis would probably try to protect him against himself.

She did not. Instead, her face softened with sympathy and something else he refused to identify. She said, "I'll be right back."

THE pressure in his head throbbed down his neck into his body. He wanted her so much, it was difficult to resist following her out into the hall. She returned in a few minutes with a 500-cc glass-stoppered reagent bottle half full of a milky fluid.

"Oral administration?" he asked.

She nodded. "Fifteen cc for the monkeys."

She secured a small beaker and a tapered graduate from the glassware cabinet and set them before him. He poured 50 cc into the graduated measure and transferred it to the beaker.

"What do they call it?" he asked.

"Sulfa-tetradine," she replied. "One of a series Peterson was testing. There is no physiological data on it yet. All he knows is that it inhibited the virus in culture. So they tried it on the monkeys."

Murt raised the beaker to his lips. It was against every sensible tenet of scientific procedure. He was amazed that Phyllis was silent as he swallowed the bland, chalky fluid. He heard a clink. Turning, he saw her raising the graduate to her lips. In it was a like quantity of sulfa-tetradine.

"What are you doing?" he half-shouted. "We don't need a test-control!"

"I'm not a control," she said softly, touching her lips with a scrap of gauze. "I've had the virus for months."

He stared at her unbelievingly. "How do you know?"

"One of the first test samples was my own blood," she said. "You saw it. It was one of the twelve positive."

"But the symptoms—you don't show a sign of—"

"Thanks," she said. "I started to break down yesterday, but you didn't notice. You see, you are my fixation and when you told me that you had it, too, I—"

"*Your* fixation!" The beaker

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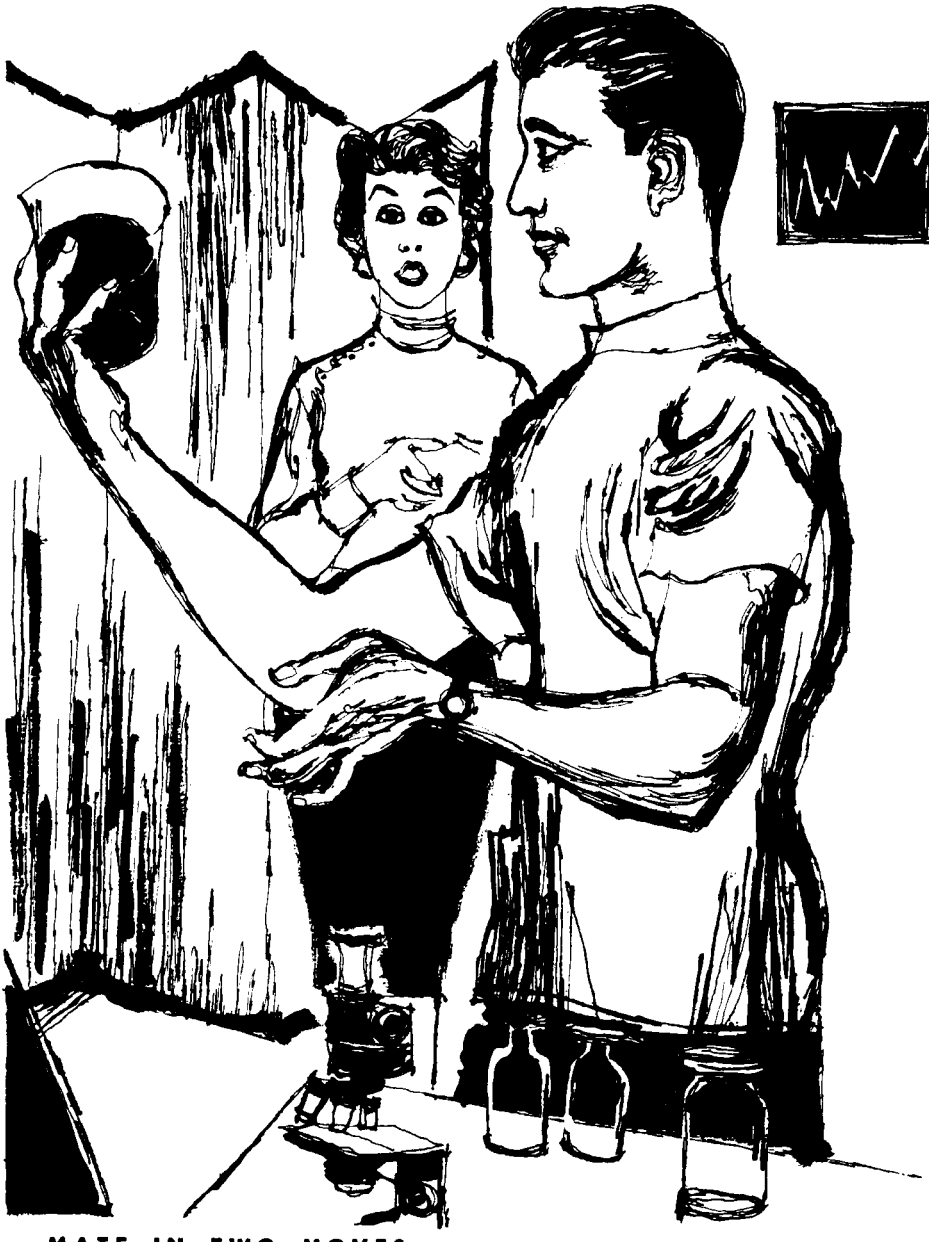

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slipped from his fingers and smashed to the tile. *"You're in love with me?"*

Her arms hung loosely at her sides and tears rimmed her eyes. "Pathologically or otherwise, I've been a case since before I started the blood tests."

They moved together and clung to each other. "Phyl, Phyl—why didn't you tell me?"

FIERCELY, she closed his lips with her own, and her fingers dug deeply into his shoulders. His arms pulled her closer yet, trying to fill the void in him that was greater than the Universe. For a long minute, the knowledge of her love and physical contact with her straining body dispelled the bleak loneliness.

When their lips parted, they gasped for breath.

It was no good. It was like tearing at an itching insect bite with your fingernails. The relief was only momentary, and it left the wound bleeding and more irritated than ever. Even if they were married—look at Peter at the club—Peter and his wife, mutually in love and completely miserable. It wasn't normal love. It was the damned virus!

As well argue with gravity. He tried to tell her, but he couldn't make her understand. Her restraint had been magnificent, but when the dam broke, it was beyond stopping the flood of her emotion. And now he couldn't believe it himself. Nothing this wonderful could be destroyed by mere misunderstanding. He cursed the years of his celibacy. All that time wasted—lost!

It was six o'clock before they reached her apartment. The License Bureau had been a mob scene. Hours more, upstairs in the City Hall waiting for the judge, while they held hands like a pair of college sophomores, staring into each others' eyes, drinking, drinking the elixir of adoration with a thirst that wouldn't be sated.

Phyllis weakened first. In the cab, after the ceremony, she released his hand and wiped her damp forehead.

Then, in the elevator, Murt felt himself relaxing. The alchemy of sustained passion had exhausted them both, he decided.

As Phyllis slipped the key in the door, she looked up at him in surprise. "Do you know, I'm hungry. I'm starved—for the first time in months."

Murt discovered his own stomach was stirring with a prosaic pangful demand of its own. "We should have stopped to eat," he said, realizing they had forgotten lunch.

"Steaks! I have some beauties in my freezer!" Phyllis exclaimed. They peeled off their coats and

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she led him into the small kitchen. She pointed at the cupboard and silverware drawer. "Set the table. We'll eat in five minutes."

SLIPPING into an apron, she explored the freezer for meat and French fries, dropped them into the HF cooker and set the timer for 90 seconds. When it clicked off, she was emptying a transparent sack of prepared salad into a bowl.

"Coffee will be ready in 50 seconds, so let's eat," she announced.

For minutes, they ate silently, ravenously, face to face in the little breakfast nook. Murt had forgotten the pure animal pleasure of satisfying a neglected appetite, and so, apparently, had his wife.

Wife! The thought jolted him.

Their eyes met, and he knew that the same thing was in her mind.

The sulfa-tetradine!

With the edge barely off his hunger, he stopped eating. She did, too. They sipped the steaming coffee and looked at each other.

"I—feel better," Phyllis said at last.

"So do I."

"I mean—I feel differently."

He studied her face. It was new. The tenseness was gone and it was a beautiful face, with soft lips and intelligent eyes. But now the eyes were merely friendly.

And it aroused no more than a casual pleasure in him, the pleasure of viewing a lovely painting or a perfect sunset. A peaceful intellectual rapport settled over them, inducing a physical lethargy. They spoke freely of their sensations, of the hypo-adrenal effects, and wondered that there was no unpleasant reaction. They decided that, initially at least, sulfa-tetradine was a miraculous success. Murt thought he should go back to the hospital and work out a report right away.

Phyllis agreed and offered to accompany him, but he said she had better get a night's sleep. The next day would be hectic.

After four hours at his desk, he called a taxi and, without hesitation, gave the address of his club. Not until he fell wearily into bed did he remember it was his wedding night.

By mutual agreement, the marriage was annulled the next day.

Feldman and Peterson were gratified at the efficacy of their drug, but both were horrified that Murt had chosen to experiment on himself. As usual, Phyl had insisted on being left out of the report.

AFTER a week of close observation, one of the monkeys was chloroformed and tissue-by-tissue examination was made by

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an army of histologists. Blood samples showed completely clear of the virus, as did a recheck on Murt's own blood. No deleterious effects could be detected, so the results were published through the Government Health Service.

It was the day before Christmas before Dr. Sylvester Murt first noticed the approaching symptoms of a relapse, or reinfection—he couldn't guess which. The past weeks had been pleasantly busy and, as acclaimed authority on Murt's virus, he had had little time to think subjectively about his experience.

Sulfa-tetradine was now considered the specific for the affliction and was being produced and shipped by the carload all over the world. The press had overgenerously insisted on giving him all the credit for the remedy as well as the isolation of the disease virus. He was an international hero.

The warning of another attack came to him at 3:30 in the afternoon, when Phyllis Sutton was leaving. She stuck her head back in the door and gave him an uncommonly warm smile and cried, "Merry Christmas, Doctor!"

He waved at her and, as the door closed, caught his breath. There was the burn in his stomach again. It passed away and he refused to give it further thought.

His own cab wound its way through the heavy Christmas Eve traffic an hour before store-closing time. Finally, the vehicle stalled in a jam. It was only six blocks to his club, so Murt paid off the driver and walked.

Part of his strategy of bachelorhood had been to ignore Christmas and the other sentimental seasons, when loneliness costs many a man his independence. But now it was impossible to ignore the snowflakes, the bustling, package-laden crowds and the street-corner Santa Clauses with their tinkling bells.

HE found himself staring into department store windows at the gay decorations.

A pair of shimmering, nearly invisible nylons caught his eye. They were the most impalpable of substances, only their bare outline visible against the white background.

He thought of Phyllis and, on impulse, went into the store and bought a pair. The clerk had to pick a size at random for him. Outside, on the sidewalk, he stared at the prettily gift-wrapped package and finally acknowledged the tremor, the tension and the old ache in the region of his diaphragm.

Relapse!

He plodded three slushy blocks up a side-street before he found

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a cab. He gave Phyllis Sutton's address to the driver and sank back in the taxi as a wave of weakness overcame him. What if she weren't home? It was Christmas Eve. She would probably be visiting friends or relatives.

But she wasn't. She opened the door under his impatient knock, and her eyes widened cordially.

"Sylvester!" she exclaimed. "Merry Christmas! Is that for me?" She pointed to the package, clutched forgotten in his hands.

"Merry, hell!" he said dispiritedly. "I came to warn you to look out for a relapse. Mine's been coming on all day."

She drew him inside, made him take off his coat and sit down before she acknowledged his remark. The apartment was cozy, with a tiny Christmas tree decorated in the window. She returned from the hall closet and sat beside him.

"Look what I did—on impulse," he said and tossed the package on her lap. "That's what really turned it on."

She opened the nylons and looked up at him sideways.

He continued unhappily, "I saw them in a window. Made me think of you, and about that time the seizure began. I tried to kid myself that I was just getting you a little token of—of my esteem, but the symptoms are almost as bad as before already."

APPARENTLY she refused to accept the seriousness of the situation. Her smile was fatuous, he thought, kissably fatuous.

"Don't you realize what this means?" he demanded. "Peterson and Feldman turned up a very distressing fact. Sulfatetradine deposits out in the endocrines, so a single dose is all a person can take. This relapse of mine means we have it all to do over again."

"Think, Dr. Murt! Just think a minute," she urged.

"About what?"

"If the sulfa deposits out in the very glands it's there to protect, how could you be suffering another attack?"

His arms ached to reach out and emphasize his argument. "I don't know. All I know is how I feel. In a way, this is even worse, because—"

"I know," Phyllis said and perversely moved close to him. "My relapse came last Tuesday when I bought you a tie for Christmas. I sent a blood sample over to Ebert Labs right away. And do you know what?"

"What?" Murt asked in a bewildered fog.

"It was negative. I don't have Murt's Virus." She slipped an arm around his waist and put her head on his shoulder. "All I've got is Murt himself."

—WINSTON MARKS

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For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

TOP OF THE WORLD

LAST year, when Mt. Everest was climbed with perfect timing for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, I watched, just out of curiosity, whether the Soviets might not make a few marginal remarks about the feat. I more or less expected that either *Pravda,* or else science fiction's

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friend, the *Literaturnaya Gazyeta,* might fire a blast stating that, though Mt. Everest had been climbed for military purposes by two war-mongering capitalistic lackeys of Wall Street, it was a lie to say that Mt. Everest was the top of the world and this planet's highest mountain. The highest mountain, they might have gone on, is tentatively designated by the name of Amne Machin and it is, furthermore, in the Soviet sphere, located in the Chinese People's Democracy. And if anybody climbed it at all, it would be proletarians.

To the best of my knowledge, nobody lifted a cudgel or a fountain pen in Amne Machin's defense. Of course the evidence is flimsy, for the mountain has only occasionally been seen by airplane pilots who guessed that it might be 3000 or 4000 feet higher than Mt. Everest. That there is a very high mountain in Northeast China is probable because of these reports, but there isn't a measurement on record which would enable one to establish its height, even with considerable uncertainty. Nor, in the absence of definite information, is there any use speculating about it.

WHAT I do want to point out is that the two men who stood on the peak of Mt. Everest were not farther out in space than anybody else had ever climbed. This is not said to belittle their enormous skill and perseverance. It just happens that they became the victims of a natural fact.

If you say that a mountain sticks out into space and that one mountain sticks out farther than another mountain, you can only mean that its peak is farther away from the center of the Earth. But if you use this criterion, it turns out that the peak of Mt. Everest does not stick out into space farther than any other.

Because of the fact that the Earth is not a perfect sphere, the mountains near the equator reach farther into space than the mountains elsewhere. And there is quite a number of respectable mountains within one degree of latitude (north or south) of the equator. In Africa, we have the Ruwenzori at 16,784 feet and Mt. Kenya at 17,040 feet. (The somewhat taller Kilimanjaro at 19,319 feet is 3 degrees from the equator.) But in the western hemisphere, we have the Cotopaxi at 19,498 feet and the Chimborazo at 20,702 feet.

According to the Smithsonian Geographic Tables, the distance of a sea-level point near the pole from the center of the Earth is 3949.8 miles or 20,855,121 feet. The distance of a sea-level point at the equator from the center of the Earth is 3963.3 miles or 20,-

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926,062 feet, so that any given mountain, if moved from the vicinity of a pole to the equator, would gain 70,941 feet in distance from the center of the Earth.

Therefore, the distance of the peak of Mt. Kenya from the center of the Earth is 20,926,062 + 17,040 = 20,943,102 feet. The peak of the Chimborazo is 20,962,062 + 20,702 = 20,946,764 feet. But Mt. Everest is 28 degrees north of the equator and the distance of its peak to the center of the Earth works out to 20,868,676 feet.

There is an uncertainty of a few hundred feet in this last figure, since the sea-level height of the mountain is still somewhat in doubt. But this uncertainty is is only a small fraction of the difference between the peak of Mt. Everest and the peak of the Chimborazo, which is actually the point farthest away from the center of our planet.

And even if that mysterious mountain in Northeast China should turn out to be higher than Mt. Everest, it still could not compete with Mt. Everest itself when it comes to distance from the center of the Earth.

Incidentally, some readers of our foreign editions will undoubtedly object that the opening of this item is propagandistic, having already done so about previous items mentioning the Soviets. Every scientist is aware that the Soviets use science, mainly through their outrageous claims of inventions and discoveries, for propaganda purposes, which are political in nature. These arrogant claims demand refutation; dismissing them as laughable would be aiding an insidious systematic lie. Lysenkoism and similar political impositions are another matter—they're tragic and I feel only pity for Soviet scientists who must submit to such nonsense or lose their jobs and even their lives.

Here, in capsule form, is the difference in viewpoint: If the Chinese mountain proved higher than Everest, the Soviets would make capital (pun intended) of the announcement; we of the West would welcome it.

NEW (OR VERY OLD) NUMBERS

THIS should really be in the questions column, but I decided to move it ahead because my answer is quite long. I received a letter from a Mr. William S. Boyd, obviously with the U. S. Air Force although no return address is given, which reads as follows: "I have read somewhere that it is possible to base arithmetics on systems of 2, 9, 12, etc. I am under the impression that all mathematics were

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based on 10. I would appreciate it if you could clarify this for me; at this Air Base, the library does not have any material on it."

Well, this is a big order. To begin somewhere, I'll say first that it is not quite correct that all mathematics is based on 10, the decimal system of counting. We do have quite a number of leftovers of older, now discarded, systems. The one still most strongly in evidence is the duodecimal system, which requires counting in units of 12. There are the expressions dozen and gross (a dozen dozens), there are a dozen months in the year and two dozen hours in the day, a dozen inches to the foot, and so forth. Another old system seems to have been based on 20, which probably meant that these people counted by using both fingers and toes. The two most frequently encountered leftovers of this system are "score" in English and *quatre-vingt* (literally 4 times 20, used for 80) from the French.

There was once a system based on 60, which is why we still have 6 times 60 degrees in a circle. In Germany, before the first World War, agriculture products were often sold by the *Mandel,* which meant 15, indicating that this was once the basis of a system of counting.

Even in mathematics itself, you do not always stick to the base of ten; you have two sets of logarithms, one based on 10 and another based on the figure *e,* the numerical value of which begins 2.71828183. These logarithms are known as the "natural logarithms" and in many cases they prove to be far more useful than those based on ten.

IT is correct that we *express* everything, including natural logarithms, in the well-known decimal system, which has its origin in the fact that we have ten fingers. A close examination of the decimal system will show how we could express it differently if we wanted to. When we count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, we use a different sign for each word. But then, when we *say* ten, we suddenly use two signs and write 10.

We have agreed that moving a figure one position to the left means that this figure is multiplied by ten. The zero just has the purpose of indicating that the figure has been moved one position. When we see a figure like 567, we know by training and habit that the 5 in this position does not mean five but five hundred and the whole is simply a condensed way of writing: "five times hundred plus six times ten plus seven times one."

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BUT we could count, as suggested by F. Emerson Andrews in his book *New Numbers* (New York, 1935 and 1944), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 as usual. The next figure, the present ten, would still be written with just one sign; F. E. Andrews suggests using the X (the Roman ten) and pronouncing it *dek*. The present eleven would follow, also written with one sign—Andrews suggests a specially shaped E—and pronounced *el*. The first figure requiring two signs to write would be the *do* (from dozen and pronounced accordingly) which would look like this: 10.

In this duodecimal system, the movement of a sign by one position means that it has been multiplied by 12. Consequently the duodecimal figure written 100 would mean a dozen dozens and the duodecimal figure 12 would be one dozen plus two ones, the 14 of decimal notation.

Now what would have happened if people had used only one hand for counting? Then we would have a system based on five and requiring only five signs, namely 1, 2, 3, 4 and 0. If a figure were moved to the left by one position, it would mean that this figure has been multiplied by 5, hence the decimal five would be written 10. In this "one-hand-system," our six would be written 11.

I hope these examples show that all that is required is a firm agreement on what a movement by one position is supposed to accomplish, whether it is supposed to mean multiplication by ten, or twelve, or five, or whatever.

Of course you may agree on a system of just two, requiring only the signs 1 and 0. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, the mathematician and philosopher, insisted that such a system had once been used by the Chinese. Whether Leibnitz was right or not is relatively unimportant, but this so-called binary system is the only one an electronic computer can handle and for this reason there is now much activity with and around the binary system. Every problem to be solved by the big computers first has to be translated into the binary system, or else the machine can't handle it. In this binary system the figures from one to ten would have to be written: 1, 10, 11, 100, 101, 110, 111, 1000, 1001, 1010.

A quarter of a century ago, before there were any electronic computers to make this system necessary, one Dr. Theodore Wolff amused himself by presenting some everyday information in the binary system. The information concerns Mr. Joshua Lehmann whose address is 75 X-Street, Apt. 4 C, and who was born in 1879. At the age of 50,

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he was married for 25 years, had six children and a yearly income of $10,000. In the binary system, the address of Mr. Lehmann is No. 1,001,011, Apt. 100 C. His birth year is 11,101,010,111 and during his 11,001 years of marriage his wife bore him 110 children which he has to feed and clothe on a mere $10,011,100,010,000 per year!

ANY QUESTIONS?

Frequently one hears of fish that live at great depths in the ocean as having burst while they were brought to the surface for study. This is supposed to be due to the sudden release of pressure under which they live normally. Another point along the same lines is a passage in Arthur C. Clarke's Childhood's End *where an ichthyologist is described as "peeping through a microscope into . . . a pressure capsule containing some specimens of deep-sea life, swimming around under its normal tons-to-the-square - centimeter conditions." Water is supposed to be incompressible, so how could there be such a high pressure in the capsule? And why do the deep-sea fish die?*

Lt. P. K. Cranston
R.C.A.F.
Trenton, Ontario
Canada

It seems to me as if there are two different reasons for the maintenance of pressure in Arthur C. Clarke's so far hypothetical pressure capsule and damage to the tissue of deep-sea fish which are brought to the surface. To begin with, when books state that water is incompressible, this is not to be taken absolutely literally. With enough pressure, several tons to the square inch, one can compress water by a *small* fraction of one per cent of its surface volume. So if one sealed a pressure capsule 2000 fathoms below the surface, the pressure would be maintained in the capsule, since the strength of the capsule's walls would substitute for the weight of 2000 fathoms of water.

But I do not believe that this explanation applies to the deep-sea fish that burst when hauled up fast. Cell walls are not steel and the tiny amount of expansion should be easily absorbed by them. Even if we make the obviously silly assumption that the cell walls do not "give," they are not impermeable to water. However, the bodies of deep-sea fish indisputably are often destroyed and torn. This is caused not by the very slight expansion of the body fluids of the fish, but by the gases disolved in the body fluids under high

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pressure and released as the pressure drops. The death of a deep-sea fish is then an extremely exaggerated case of "the bends," which has the same cause.

What does plutonium look like? I have not been able to find this fact in declassified literature.

Herbert Schaefer
83-26 Vietor Avenue
Elmhurst, L. I., N. Y.

This is something I had not seen mentioned anywhere, either. But I felt quite sure that there was no reason to keep the outward appearance of plutonium classified, so I queried the Atomic Energy Commission. The answer might be slightly disappointing to many people, for the AEC replied that "plutonium is quite similar to lead in appearance."

I have read the book about Dr. Wernher von Braun's plan about a space station, but there is something I do not understand. Dr. von Braun says at one point that the rocket ship from Earth, bringing up supplies, would move in the same orbit as the space station, but a few hundred feet away. The supplies would then be ferried across. How is this possible? According to the tables in the book, the third stage of the rocket ship, as it gets to the space station, weighs 66.4 tons. The weight of the space station is not stated anywhere, but it must be well over 400 tons. How can these two move in the same orbit with the same speed if one weighs more than six times as much as the others? Please explain.

Fred B. Manzell
Chicago 15, Ill.
2207 West 77th Street

This is a question I have been asked repeatedly after lectures. The answer is that the whole question is wrong because the orbital velocity (in a given orbit) does not depend on the weight, or rather mass, of the orbiting body. But I also know from lecture experience that this answer is usually received with a considerable amount of distrust, so I'll try to make my readers visualize why this is so.

If you still have the December 1953 issue of *Galaxy* on hand, you'll find a reply having to do with the motion of our moon. I said there that if the Moon and Earth were of equal mass, both bodies would revolve around their common center of gravity, which would be halfway between them. But since the Moon has a much smaller mass than Earth, the common center of gravity of the two bodies is much closer to

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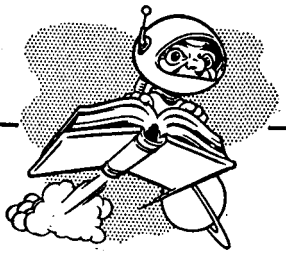
the center of Earth.

In fact, this "barycenter," to use the technical term, happens to be inside the Earth, a thousand miles below the surface. If you imagine that the diameter of our moon were only 216 miles (instead of the 2160 miles which is the true figure), the barycenter of the Earth/Moon system is likely to be a short walking distance from the center of our planet.

In short: the smaller the mass of the body revolving around the Earth, the closer the barycenter to the center of the bigger body. In the case of a space station of a few hundred tons, the barycenter of the Earth/Space station system will, to all intents and purposes, coincide with the center of the Earth. In the case of a rocketship of 66.4 tons, the barycenter will also coincide with the center of the planet. Hence the station and the rocketship will both be able to revolve around the Earth at the same speed in the same orbit, even though their masses are decidedly different. But neither of their masses amounts to anything when compared to that of the Earth.

Is there any truth to the rumor that scientists have discovered a new planet beyond Pluto?



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William McCain
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c/o Postmaster, New York

I haven't heard any such rumor and I doubt that I ever will, for such a discovery would not be rumored — it would be announced. The possibility that one or two yet unknown planets might move around our sun beyond the orbits of Neptune and Pluto is generally admitted.

As you may know, the planet Neptune was discovered a little over a century ago as a result of careful calculations based on the deviations of Uranus from its predicted orbital movement. This discovery set the pattern for Pluto, for it was found the same way. The surprise was that Pluto was much closer to the Sun that had been assumed. Part of its orbit is actually inside the orbit of Neptune. Pluto also seems to differ from the physical pattern that is the rule for the outer planets, and the thought has been advanced that Pluto may once have been a third moon of Neptune.

The general feeling is that the "Trans-Neptune" that astronomers had been hunting is still unknown. There are two reasons for this assumption: Neptune does deviate from its calculated orbit in a manner indicating an unknown planet bigger than Pluto; and a number of comet orbits are such that they indicate the existence of a planet at about twice the distance of Neptune from the Sun.

Are there any metals known with melting points higher or lower than those of tungsten and mercury (which I take to be the extremes)? Do non-metals show more extreme melting points than these metals?

G. Schwaber
Binghampton, N. Y.

Mercury and tungsten (wolfram) still represent the known extremes, the former having a melting point of -39° centigrade (-38° Fahrenheit) and the latter probably at 3382° centigrade (6119° Fahrenheit).

As for your second question, the answer is emphatically yes. Helium has a melting point somewhere near 1 degree absolute, while metal carbides have higher melting points than metals. The highest reported is for a mixture of 80 per cent tantalum carbide and 20 per cent hafnium carbide, which was established to be 3930° centigrade or 7110° Fahrenheit.

—WILLY LEY

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Open Warfare

By JAMES E. GUNN

Tournament testing had made Jim a machine golfer—but he faced a player with no nerves at all!

Illustrated by ASHMAN

THE tournament hadn't been conceded, exactly, but everybody agreed that Jim was the man to beat. Everybody —the professionals, the fans, the sportswriters . . .

Slim Jim Pearson, the hard-luck boy with the velvet swing, is finally going to cop that U. S. Open crown. Look up these words five days from now.

He's no longer the Jim Pearson who swung eight times at a ball buried in a sand trap in 1957, or the Jim Pearson who four-putted a green and picked up in disgust in 1960 when he could have parred in to win. He's the Jim Pearson who has won ten major tournaments on the winter circuit, the last five straight, and collected $25,000 with a sparkling performance of cool, steady golf . . .

The Open didn't pay off anything close to $25,000, of course. The extras made up the difference. Fame was negotiable—testimonials, articles, books, sporting goods contracts.

Fifty thousand dollars . . .

And the money didn't mean a thing. It was just the price tag on a girl named Alice Hatcher, who was no different from any other attractive young girl except that Jim Pearson happened to love her, and her father happened to have uncountable millions of dollars. Like the marching Chinese, while you were counting them, more millions were born.

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PUDGY Sam Hatcher, who would never break ninety, concealed his steely mind behind a soft face. Only after he was trapped, had Jim recognized the inflexible purpose and the wily cleverness behind it.

"You're a good golfer, Jim," Hatcher said, easing off his spiked shoes with a sigh, "even if you can't teach me anything. We've been good to you at the Country Club. I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, sir?"

"Stay away from Alice!"

"But, Mr. Hatcher!"

"I won't have her marrying a man who has nothing but coordination and muscles. When I was only your age, I was making $50,000 a year. It takes brains to do that. Brains get more valuable. Muscles deteriorate. There's nothing muscles can't do that a machine can't do better."

"You don't think I could make $50,000?" Jim said angrily.

"I know damn well you couldn't," Hatcher said. "You haven't got the guts. If you ever got within sight of it, you'd blow up—like you did in St. Louis."

Before Jim had known it, he was wrapped up, sealed, addressed and—he feared—headed for the dead-letter office. If he could make $50,000 in a year, he could have Alice—if he could get her—with Hatcher's blessing. If he failed—well, he wouldn't see Alice again.

Jim had had a long time to think about it—the better part of a year—and to admire the way he had been outmaneuvered. Fifty thousand dollars—a shrewd figure. Right at the top of the possible. Not impossible, but so close to it as to be practically indistinguishable.

There had been side effects. Touring the tournament circuit had kept him away from Alice as effectively as walls and armed guards. And somehow—Jim had a good idea how—Alice had learned about the bet. A few days after Jim had won his first big tournament, he got a note.

I won't be bought and sold. Al.

That was that—or was it? For a few days, Jim had been angry with a blind anger that cost him $5,000. And then he saw a picture over a caption that read—

Industrialist Samuel Hatcher bids bon voyage to his daughter, Alice, who will spend the next six months studying in England.

Jim studied Hatcher's expression of bland triumph. Suddenly, his anger became something else—something cold and determined. Nerves? Temperament? He didn't have any.

Each long, low, flat drive was

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a fist in Hatcher's face—each sure putt a dagger in his back. The prize money rolled in. The tournaments dropped behind, conquered, forgotten. And then it was Open time. The bet was almost won. And if Hatcher thought he couldn't lose, Jim had a surprise for him.

He would take the whole fifty thousand, Jim thought, and lay it in front of Alice and say, "I wasn't buying you, I was buying the right to tell you that I love you." And if that didn't work, he would set fire to the putting greens at night—all 18 of them.

Maybe Hatcher knew finance—but he didn't know golf, and he didn't know the way of a man with a maiden.

All it took was the U.S. Open. And nobody else could keep up the pace for four rounds. Jim grinned—it was going to be that easy.

And then Saul showed up.

THE first hint of disaster came at the practice tee. Jim was methodically sharpening up his No. 1 woods when the spectators deserted him. The appreciative murmurs died away. Jim looked up. The mob had clotted around another tee, several hundred feet away. Jim waved the caddy in and sauntered toward the attraction that had taken the crowd away from the man picked to win the Open. Not annoyed, not upset—just curious.

From a knoll behind the other tee, Jim got a good view of the big, tall golfer. The tanned, impassive features were unfamiliar. And then the driver came down in a glittering arc.

Jim pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. He knew all the professionals and most of the top-notch amateurs. No stranger should have a swing that good, that effortless, that grooved.

But the real shock came when Jim followed the smooth arc of the glistening ball. Jim's eyes were good, or he might have lost it as it dwindled in the distance. The caddy stood at least 280 yards down the fairway, with a ball bag in his hands. He didn't move—and the ball dropped right in the middle of the sack.

Accident, Jim thought shakily. But it happened a second time and a third, and so on until Jim lost count. Every club in the bag was used with the same incredible accuracy. The caddy had a snap job—he didn't have to stoop once.

Trick-shot artist, Jim told himself. *Wait until he gets in competition.* But there wasn't anybody that good. Not even old Joe Kirkwood.

"Quite a spectacle, eh, Jim?"

Jim knew that brisk, businesslike voice. He turned. "Hello,

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Hatcher." He tried to keep his voice friendly.

Hatcher was as fat as ever. "Must be unnerving to watch something like that."

"I can stand it."

"But will you be able to stand it when the going gets rough?" Hatcher asked solicitously. "Or will you blow up like you always do? It would be too bad, just when you're so close."

"You haven't forgotten our bet, then?"

"Of course not, Jim." He chuckled. "I never forget anything."

"You've kept close track," Jim said steadily. "What about Alice? Has she kept track, too?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. She's in England, you know. I suspect, however, that she has forgotten all about you."

"She'll remember. The next four days will remind her."

"I suppose so," Hatcher said thoughtfully. "Sadly, I'm afraid. Saul will see to that."

"Saul?"

Hatcher nodded toward the golfer on the tee. "Saul."

Jim's eyes narrowed. "You know him?"

Hatcher was enigmatic. "I brought him here—my own personal entry. His first tournament was the qualifying round, and he's going to beat you out of the Open."

Score up another one for Hatcher. "Then he's got something to learn," Jim said confidently.

Hatcher turned to watch Saul. The clean, crisp smack of club against ball came with clockwork regularity. "Just a dumb, country boy," he said. "Never saw a golf club until a few months ago. But I think he might teach you something, Jim."

Jim's gaze drifted irresistibly to the golf balls soaring down the fairway into the canvas sack. That was what he would have to beat.

JIM'S threesome teed off early in the morning. Jim felt good. A night's sound sleep had brought back his self-confidence. He was going to enjoy winning.

From the moment he drew his driver out of the leather bag, he knew he was going to have a good day. The grip fitted snugly into his hand. His flat, thin muscles rippled without a twinge. His practice swings were loose and effortless.

The crowd was sympathetic. That always helped. They wanted to see him burn up the course. He had another rooter, too, and there was another thousand in the bank. An eager young man from a sporting goods company had talked him into using a new golf ball. The company had planned a big campaign to advertise

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it. *Guaranteed to add twenty yards to every drive.* They would like to add, *Used by Jim Pearson when he won the U.S. Open.*

They'd have that chance, Jim thought firmly. He knelt to tee up his ball.

"Don't tighten up yet," said a voice he was coming to know too well. "Give the crowd a show for its money."

Jim turned. "You can't have much confidence in your champion, Hatcher, if you have to try psychological tricks like this."

"All the confidence in the world, Jim," Hatcher said breezily. "I just don't take chances. *You* take chances. That's why you always lose."

"Don't be too sure. I haven't lost yet."

Hatcher shrugged. "You haven't seen Alice, have you?"

Jim forced himself to take three deep breaths. When he stepped up to his ball, he was calm. He took a few experimental waggles. The crowd sighed as his deceptively easy swing sent his first drive soaring down the fairway. It was long and straight. The slightest hook would send the ball scooting down a slope to the left behind a clump of trees on the 530-yard par-five hole.

It wasn't too tough a birdie. The next four dropped in par. Cameras clicked and whirred. The crowd applauded, held its breath or groaned in sympathy.

On the par-five sixth, Jim relaxed and lit a cigarette. It was a good day to be playing. The sky was an improbable blue—the fairway was green and springy. Jim took a deep breath and smiled at the crowd. They liked that. They applauded.

Jim got his second shock.

The white flash of a girl's face, the arch of a slim body in a cool summer dress . . . Jim started toward her.

"Al," he said, then stopped. He cursed silently. He was beginning to see things.

He tossed his cigarette away and ground it into the turf. The sixth fell, nevertheless, in birdie figures. Three more pars made him 34 for the first nine. Not brilliant golf, but the kind that won tournaments. And two putts might have dropped, but hadn't.

THE second nine was even better. Jim played smoothly, confidently. The crowd, that had been tense and excited over his four birdies and three pars, began slipping away at the sixteenth. That didn't bother him. A roar of approval drifted faintly over the fairway from time to time. On the last two holes he got a birdie and a par.

He glanced quickly over the card. A 34 and a 32, for 66 on

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the eighteen. Six birdies—twelve pars. Three more like that should win easily.

The crowd around the eighteenth green opened in front of him as he walked toward the clubhouse. Strangers reached out to shake his hand and pound him on the back. Jim smiled for them.

"How was the golf ball, huh?" It was the eager young man.

"Fine," Jim said.

"I'll leave a couple of dozen with your caddy."

"Fine," Jim said.

Jim watched his score being posted on the big board. Most of the field was still out, but he was ahead of the closest competitor by three strokes. As he turned away, the crowd at the eighteenth green roared.

That usually meant a hot round. Jim waited. Maybe some joker had tied his 66.

A big, tall, bronzed golfer plodded silently through the crowd. Nobody shook his hand. Nobody pounded his back. But they looked at him with awe. Jim watched him for a moment and frowned.

He turned to watch Saul's score go down on the board, but two men were talking behind him. One of them was a syndicated sports writer.

"*Wow!*" the columnist said. "Clockwork—precision! There's

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never been anything like it. Nerves? He never opened his mouth."

The other man mumbled something.

"Yes, I said it and I'll take it all back," the writer replied. "Saul's the man to beat, not Pearson."

Jim flushed, but the other man spoke up. "I'll still bet on Pearson."

"And I'll take all you can scrape together. This Saul's a machine—every shot just where he wants it. Let me put that down before I forget it—Silent Saul, the Mechanical Man."

Jim looked back to the scoreboard. His eyes flashed quickly across the row of precise figures:

4 3 4 4 3 4 3 4 3—32
3 3 4 4 4 3 3 4 4 32—64

That tied the course record and beat him by two. The procession of threes and fours was fantastic.

"What's the matter, Jim?" Hatcher said from behind him. "You don't look well."

Jim turned, smiling. It was an effort, but he made it. "One round isn't a tournament," he said casually.

Hatcher sighed. "Comfort yourself while you can. Saul's just getting warmed up. He's that mythical thing, the perfect golfer, but he's dumb. No brains, Jim—no brains at all."

JIM stared at the sports-page headline and lost all appetite for breakfast.

SILENT SAUL
THE MAN TO BEAT

Pearson's 66
Places Second
To Record-Tying 64

Jim Pearson, the fair-haired boy of the tournament circuit, rolled up a sparkling 66 for yesterday's first round of the U.S. Open. But only a few minutes later, Silent Saul, mystery man of the tournament, blazed in . . .

Jim set his jaw firmly and forced down his bacon and eggs. The Open wasn't over yet. There was a lot of golf yet to be played. He glanced through his mail. An English stamp! *England.* He ripped open the letter.

A girl can change her mind. Win the Open—for me.

Al.

Jim waited until his breathing slowed. He got up, stuffed the note in his pocket, sauntered to the practice tee.

So she *was* in England. But if she loved him, why did this one tournament matter? What difference did $50,000 make? He

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tried to see the situation from Alice's viewpoint and shook his head. Maybe Hatcher was right. Maybe he wasn't so smart. But there was one thing he *was* good at, one thing at which, when he was feeling his best, he was unbeatable.

An hour's practice went well. His hands felt good today, slim and strong. That was always a sign of readiness. He strolled over to the starting tee.

The crowd was small. When he stepped up to his ball, there was only a smattering of applause. His drive was as straight as the day before and longer by almost 20 yards.

Jim played grimly and accurately. From ahead, as regularly as a pulse, came roars of approval. That was Saul, he thought. His game became, if anything, crisper.

The crowd was larger as he teed off on number 10. The underdog, he thought—they always pull for the underdog if he's making a game fight. But if he appeared to be certain to lose—well, they were human. They liked to be on the winning side.

HIS second nine was a duplicate of the day before—another 32. But the applause, as he dropped the putt on the eighteenth, was perfunctory.

Jim puzzled over it as he handed the putter to his caddy. He had equalled Saul's record-tying score of yesterday. Surely Saul hadn't repeated. His luck had to run out.

It was worse than that. It was—

4 2 3 4 3 4 3 4 4—31
4 4 3 3 3 4 4 31—62

He had broken the record and beaten Jim by two strokes. Jim was four strokes down. He turned away, his face set and hard. He wasn't even surprised to find Hatcher behind him.

"What have you got to say, Jim," Hatcher inquired.

What Jim wanted to say was unprintable. After a moment, however, he forced a smile.

"That's better," Hatcher said. "The good old American tradition. Good sportsmanship—that sort of thing. Bushwash! They pay off on winners."

"You haven't seen anything yet," Jim said.

"You know," Hatcher said, "I was just going to say the same thing."

Jim brushed past him and walked toward the clubhouse. There was something terribly wrong with the whole setup. In real life, things didn't happen like this. People didn't pop out of nowhere and break all records to win the Open. Men didn't take up

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the game and become perfect golfers in a few months. Hatcher had said either too much or too little.

Saul had a weakness. There was no perfect golfer. But how could Jim find that weakness and take advantage of it!

"*Dave,*" Jim said. He caught the scurrying tournament manager by a sleeve.

"There's some dispute about a penalty," Dave said, trying to get away.

"When am I supposed to go out tomorrow?"

"Afternoon."

"And Saul?"

"A little later. What *is* this?" Dave scowled.

"Let me go out in the morning," Jim said.

"Well, I don't—"

"It means a lot," Jim said quickly. "I've got an appointment in the afternoon."

"Well," Dave said, "I don't see how it can hurt . . ."

"Thanks, Dave. You won't regret it." And, as the official broke into a trot Jim added under his breath, "But someone will."

Hatcher hadn't been content with a simple bet, not even with all the odds in his favor. He had played all angles and, when he was about to lose, had pulled a rabbit out of his hat. Any way to win. That was a two-sided game, also.

THE out-nine bowed for Jim in 32 again, as he missed his usual birdie on the first hole and got it back with a 2 on the second. On the back nine, he slipped a stroke to a 33. But he refused to blow up under the pressure of Saul's four-stroke lead.

His 195 total broke several fifty-four hole records. And yet Saul could drop to a 69 to tie. Jim had a hunch Saul's game wasn't going to break. Not today.

He shook off the reporters, gobbled a sandwich and returned to the starting tee almost unnoticed. He was lost in a crowd of thousands, gathered to see Silent Saul blaze to new heights.

Saul's effortless swing belted the ball over 300 yards down the fairway, straight as the shortest distance between two points. Jim wasn't watching. His eyes were half-closed, studying the mental picture of that swing.

There was something wrong with it, something naggingly suspicious about it. Jim couldn't pin it down. It seemed—familiar—and yet Jim felt he'd never seen it before that first mad day.

Jim tramped the fairway with the rest of the spectators, drawing close enough to hear anything Saul might say to his caddy or Hatcher. There wasn't anything to hear. Saul was silent as a mute.

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Saul sent one sweeping glance toward the green, 240 yards distant, selected a club from the bag, took a few oddly-familiar waggling gestures before he set his driver behind the ball and swung. The ball lit on the front edge of the green and bit.

Saul's putt rolled straight for the hole until an unruly blade of grass deflected it an inch to the right of the cup. A birdie.

That was the pattern. The only luck Saul was playing in was bad. It rode his shoulders pickaback, spoiling the incredible accuracy of his shots. A gust of wind caught a lofting seven-iron pitch—a bad bounce called up a brilliant recovery—a spectator stopped the ball short of the green with his head.

Jim smiled ruefully. Against this combination of bad breaks, Saul had whipped the front nine in 32.

What would he do when he was lucky?

And still those familiarities of swing plagued Jim's memory. Wild ideas flitted through his mind—disguise—mass hallucination. He pushed them away. This was real. And there had never been anyone this good.

The only inconsistency about Saul were his unnecessary preparatory movements. The sports writer was right. Saul was a golfing machine, tuned to perfection for just one thing. And he did nothing else. He didn't even talk.

At the start of the eleventh hole, Hatcher caught sight of him. "Ah," he said, "come to take some lessons?"

"I hope to learn something," Jim said quietly.

"Watch Saul—you will." Hatcher smiled. "Of course, the papers will eat this up. 'Pearson watches Saul spike hopes for Open.' "

Jim didn't answer. He was watching Saul again. His drive cleared the trees to roll to a stop close to the green.

"Where did he learn to drive like that?" Jim mused.

"Saul?" Hatcher laughed. "Why, he's a natural born golfer!"

Jim left him laughing and puffing far behind.

HE got his first clue on the sixteenth green. Jim scowled as Saul drew back his putter in a smooth, wrist-powered arc. And Jim had part of the answer.

It might have been Tod Winters putting—Tod who was the most brilliant putter of the last ten years. Frowning, Jim's narrowed eyes obscured the physical difference, and the form leaped out at him. Saul had patterned his putting on that of Tod Winters.

No—that wasn't quite it. It

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was like a picture of Tod, every idiosyncrasy duplicated without reason, superimposed on Saul's massive frame.

The putt rimmed the cup and was dropped for a par. Jim walked dazedly with the crowd to the next tee. Watching Saul's drive, something sprang into his mind, then was gone before he could grasp it.

Jim shook his head and watched the long-iron shot arch beautifully to the green. That one was obvious. George Potter, who would have been a great champion if all his shots had been as well played as his long irons, was the model this time.

But again, the things that were duplicated were variations that added nothing to the success of the shots. No golfer in his right mind would have duplicated those. The waggles and twitches were Potter's way of preparing himself psychologically for the stroke.

Why had Saul duplicated everything? How had he done it so faithfully?

The crowd's roar brought Jim scurrying to the tree-embraced tee to watch Saul's last drive. This time the nagging thought leaped again—and stayed.

He might have been looking in a mirror. He should have realized it before. Of course, Saul would duplicate Jim's driving form. *He* was the boy with the velvet swing, the controlled drives that no one had outdistanced before Saul came along.

He didn't even have to watch the approach shot. Saul might be the golfer, but it would be Gordon Brown's technique. And then, as he watched Saul putt twice for a par, the answer came, the answer that was incredible but, somehow—inescapably—true.

As Jim expected, Hatcher was at his elbow with a few well-chosen comments. "A 63—you're six strokes behind with one round to go. Do you want to give up now?"

"I don't think I will," Jim said evenly. "You see, Hatcher, I did learn something — something I wasn't supposed to learn."

Hatcher was amused. "Yes? And what is that?"

"I think we'd better talk about it privately."

"Oh, that won't be necessary."

Jim shrugged. "It doesn't matter to me." He leaned closer to Hatcher and added softly, "But I know that Saul is a robot."

FROM the clubhouse dining room, came sounds of carefree confusion—plates and silverware clinking, spiked shoes clomping across shredded floors, loud voices describing this one that rimmed or that one that dropped. Inside the little private room,

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where Hatcher stood looking out the window at the rolling, green fairway, there was silence.

A smile curled the corners of Hatcher's mouth. "So you think Saul is a robot."

"Isn't he?"

Hatcher chuckled. "Of course he is. How does it feel to be beaten at your own game by a mindless machine."

"You haven't won yet," Jim said. "A golf ball takes some funny bounces."

"How did you find out—about Saul?"

"Saul is a lot of things," Jim said slowly, "but none of them is Saul. Saul is Tod Winters, George Potter, Gordon Brown and me. Take us away and there's nothing left."

"Nothing human," Hatcher said. "Just a memory, a power source, a lot of wires and a lot of motors."

Jim shook his head. "How did you do it?"

"Money can do anything. All it needs is a purpose. Someone has developed a colloidal memory bank? That's a brain—get it? The new miniature atomic power plant is ideal. Use it. Make thousands of tiny motors to serve as muscles. Throw in some sensory mechanisms, some relays, then feed in an analysis of a slow-motion pictorial study."

"And you have a golf machine."

"Exactly," Hatcher said.

"It must have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars," Jim said bitterly.

"Closer to a million." Hatcher was cheerful.

"A million dollars to keep me from winning twenty-five thousand," Jim said. "Don't you think that's unfair?"

"Unfair?" Hatcher echoed, smiling. "*There*'s a machine response for you. That's what the loser always says. Be a little better, a little smarter, a little stronger than your competitor, and he runs to the government, yanks on its apron strings and screams, 'Unfair competition. Unfair competition!' Understand this, Jim—nothing's unfair that doesn't break the rules. And the only rule worth remembering is this—the best man always wins."

"You mean the best machine," Jim said sourly.

"A machine is only an extension of a man, like your driver. I don't happen to be endowed with golfing muscles and responses. You do. Those—and your golf clubs, Jim—let you hit a ball farther and straighter than anybody else. Saul lets me hit a ball farther and straighter than you do. It's as simple as that."

JIM said, "That wasn't the bet. The bet was that I couldn't make $50,000 in a year. Not that

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you couldn't spend twenty times that to keep me from making half as much. That was obvious from the start."

"Maybe that was *your* bet. It wasn't *mine*. I bet that I could beat you at your own game. I didn't think you were good enough for Alice, not smart enough, not man enough. Maybe you didn't have a chance anyway—*I* don't know. But she was spending too much time at the Country Club, and it wasn't just to improve her game. Should I let a few well-distributed, well-trained muscles blind her to what you really are?"

"And what's that?"

"Why, you're a quitter, Jim. You can't stand pressure. You're no competitor. You've proved that time after time. Maybe Alice couldn't see it. I had to keep her from a foolish mistake."

Jim frowned. Maybe it *had* been true. It wasn't true any more—if he could only prove it. "And yet I was going to win—until you threw your millions against me," he said.

HATCHER shook his head. His jowls wobbled. "Could I let luck give away what I value most? Of course not. Alice deserves the best, the smartest, the strongest. I knew you were a weakling. If you couldn't win at your own game, you couldn't win at anything else. At least I gave you that chance."

"*Chance!*" Jim's eyes studied the floor moodily.

"Have you ever played poker, Jim?"

Jim looked up. "Sure."

"Then maybe you know that, over the long run, the smartest player always wins. *Over the long run.* You have to give luck time to even out. That means the winner is the man who can stay in the game the longest, the one with the most chips. There's a moral in that. Poor men should never play poker. Rich men should play nothing else."

"So you made sure I couldn't win," Jim said. "All because of a preconception that I'm a quitter. One ninety-five for 54 holes. I don't call that quitting."

Hatcher shrugged heavy shoulders. "What will you do tomorrow, Jim? Or next week? What will you do when it's more than just a game, when the going really gets rough? That's what it is now. This is for keeps. And it isn't enough just to come close. You've got to have the will to win. Everything is unacceptable but victory."

"According to my standards, Hatcher," Jim said grimly, "you haven't played fair. Suppose I should lose—through no fault of my own—and try to win Alice anyway?"

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Hatcher's voice was just as grim. "Then I'd know that you are a welsher besides a quitter. And I'd act accordingly—without compunctions."

Jim knew what Hatcher could do if he wanted to. "And suppose I should win tomorrow?"

Hatcher's face relaxed. "Six strokes back? Playing against the perfect golfer?"

"Suppose!" Jim said firmly.

Hatcher sobered and studied Jim's face. "Then I'd have to admit I was wrong. You have my word on that. And you could have Alice—if she wants you."

There was a small sound from the doorway. Jim turned. She was standing there, cool, slim, desirable.

"Al . . ." he said, and knew that he loved her more than ever.

HOW long had she been there? Hatcher turned. "*Alice!* But I got a letter from you this morning—from England."

Her voice was low and musical, as Jim remembered it.

"I left them with a friend to mail for me." She walked forward slowly. "I wanted to keep myself out of this. I was afraid I might disturb something."

"But you should know," Hatcher said affectionately, "that you could never disturb me."

"I was thinking of Jim," she said slowly.

Jim straightened up. He looked intently into the face he loved.

Alice's red lips twisted ironically. "That's funny, isn't it? And it's funny to stand here like this and talk coldly about something that was never put into words before. And the funniest part is that I wasn't really in love with Jim—not then, not really."

"Al . . ." Jim began, and stopped. There was nothing he could say. Alice's blue eyes turned toward him, and Jim told himself that they held a warm promise.

"It probably wouldn't ever have come to anything, Dad," Alice said quietly. "But then you let me find out about the bet. I was mad at first, but then I started to think. The bet told me something. It told me Jim was in love with me, enough to make a crazy bet like that on the wild chance that he might win. That was something I had never been sure of before, with any man. And then you kept us apart. That was more. It's worked for thousands of years. It worked this time. I fell in love."

Jim swallowed hard. In a moment he would break out singing.

"You don't know how I prayed and fought every one of his tournaments with him. And, when he got so close, I had to be here. I had to be near him, even if I couldn't let him know, for fear

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that it would upset his game."

Hatcher nodded. "I can see why you'd be afraid of that."

"You're wrong, Dad," Alice said earnestly. "He's not a quitter. He's proved that. Anybody but you would admit it. Sure he's human. He's not a machine and I love him."

"Love?" Hatcher shrugged his shoulders. "It comes and goes. The only thing that doesn't change is character."

"You can't prove that with a machine," Alice said firmly.

"It's his own game. Remember that. If a machine can play it better than he can, he should lose. Take away his one ability and what have you got? Nothing!" He turned to Jim. "The bet still stands." He smiled gently at Alice. "I won't let you throw yourself away on a childish whim."

And he stalked out of the room with all the delicacy and refinement of a bull elephant.

JIM stared at Alice for a moment, then took two giant strides and gathered her in his arms. Eventually, they drew apart.

"Did you mean that?" he asked. "About loving me."

She nodded, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"What can we do?" he continued.

"Nothing," she said hopelessly. "You heard what he said about not letting me throw myself away. He meant it. He could do it, too."

"Then I've got to beat Saul," Jim said bravely. But he knew, while he said it, that he was whistling in the dark. He wasn't playing against another golfer. He was playing against himself —*and* Tod Winters *and* George Potter *and* Gordon Brown, the best of each. Against perfection, he had only his own fallible, erratic skill. Against machine judgment and nerveless metal, he had to pit the illusioned human senses and nerves that could, he knew only too well, turn to quivering jelly.

"Somewhere," he said slowly, "Saul must have an Achilles heel. The prime fact about man is his adaptability. An imitation would have to have built-in limitations."

"That's *it!*" Alice said excitedly. "They had to build in at least one constant, if not more. If we can find it and alter the conditions . . ."

"Judgment?" Jim suggested. He tossed the idea away. "No—judgment has to be flexible. They couldn't know when he'd meet up with wind, rain, sunbaked courses, slow greens, fast ones, wormcasts . . ."

"He does it, too," Alice said. "I've watched him. Maybe we

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could find where he's kept. Tinker with him—smash him!"

"That wouldn't be fair. I could probably have him disqualified, of course. But that wouldn't be fair either."

"*Fair!*" Alice exploded. "Has *Dad* played fair? This isn't a game, Jim. We've got to win."

Jim smiled at the essential amorality of women and sobered. "That isn't what I meant. I mean your father wouldn't accept it. According to his lights, he's played fair with me. He could have had me crippled, poisoned or taken out of action in lots of ways—and gotten away with it. But he's beating me on my own ground. And that's where we've got to beat him."

ALICE shook her head. "All that skill and energy—wasted on something like this."

"And it could be such a wonderful thing," Jim said. "Profitable, too. Think of the things that machines could do, if they had memories and self-contained power! Not man-shapes, like Saul. That's useless. They could do all the jobs that man's too weak to do or that are too dangerous or too much drudgery."

"Mining," Alice said, "and manufacturing."

"Exploring — the cold places and the hot places. The deeps of the sea and space. Rebuilding—making uninhabitable places livable." Jim's eyes were distant. "The important thing is that they can't compete. Man won't stand for it. He'll destroy them first. And they can never conquer Man, because he's too adaptable. Unless he lets them."

"That's wonderful," Alice said, her eyes glowing. "Tell Dad. He can recognize a good idea when he hears it. He won't think you're so dumb then."

"I could probably like him," Jim said, "except he won't give me the chance. Not unless we find the constant. I guess I'll just have to play my heart out tomorrow."

"You can't do it, darling. You'd have to shoot in the fifties!"

"A golf ball takes some funny bounces," Jim said. He turned to the window and stuck his hands moodily in his pockets. He started. It was as simple as that.

"There *is* a constant," he said exultantly, swinging around. "Look, Al. Here's the key to my locker. Get my caddy and Saul's. I think you'll have more luck with the boy than I would. Give him—oh, five or ten dollars. And here's what I want you to do . . ."

In the middle of the explanation, Alice caught fire, too. As he finished, she gave Jim a quick, proud kiss and hurried out. Jim's eyes followed her admiringly for

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a moment, and then he reluctantly turned toward the dining room.

Jim dragged Dave Simpson, the tournament official, protestingly away from a hearty meal. "I've just had a wonderful idea," he said. "Why don't you put Saul and me together for tomorrow's round."

"*What!*" Dave exclaimed.

"Think of the crowds, Dave," Jim urged.

"But what about you? What chance will you have, playing with a man who has you down six strokes?"

"Oh, that's all right," Jim said bravely. "I don't mind. But if you're not interested . . ."

Jim moved to turn away. Dave caught him by an elbow.

"I didn't say I wasn't interested. If it's all right with you, I don't think anyone else will object."

Jim thought of Hatcher. "No," he said, "I don't think they will."

Jim walked away, whistling.

THE reaction set in when he strode onto the tee next morning. The crowd was immense and noisy. It was all very well to plan something like this in the abstract. But, in the clutch, would his nerve fail him, as it had failed him before?

Alice was waiting for him, cool and lovely and infinitely desirable. She put her hand on his arm and warmed him with a smile.

On the other side of the broad tee, Hatcher's smile was mocking. Beside him, Saul, the robot, waited impassively. Jim knew then that it wasn't going to be as easy as he had thought.

It wouldn't be enough to hope that he had thrown a wrench into Saul's machinery. He would have to fight grimly, determinedly. He would have to play the greatest game of his life today, if he wanted to win.

The crowd was partisan. Like most Americans, they were pulling for the underdog. Jim knew they wanted him to play brilliantly, if only to narrow the gap and make the match thrilling and that, if he failed to come through for them, they would swing to Saul.

Even realizing all this, it warmed him as they cheered him up to the tee—knowing that what they really wanted was to see golfing history made. God willing, that was what they would see.

Jim's drive took a tail-end hook. It dived into the rough behind a clump of trees. He stepped back, grimacing. He would have appreciated a happier start.

As Jim watched closely, Saul took a ball from his caddy, teed it up, settled himself and swung.

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The ball sailed straight down the fairway, forty or fifty yards beyond the 300-yard marker. The crowd gasped. Jim smiled.

When he saw his lie, the smile was wiped away. Sensible golf would have been to play it safe, out onto the fairway, where he could hope to play his third shot straight enough for a par.

Sensible golf wouldn't win. Jim took out his two-iron, sighted through a small hole in the trees and swung at the almost-hidden ball. It whipped through the opening and rolled to a stop just in front of the green.

Saul's easy four-iron shot was dead on the pin all the way, but the crowd moaned sympathetically as the ball hit the back edge of the green and hopped into the rough.

Hatcher looked puzzled as he stood beside the green. Jim's close approach set up an easy putt for a birdie. Saul's recovery was long, and two putts gave him a par.

Jim smiled grimly. That was one of the six strokes he needed.

Jim's game sparkled — Saul kept finding trouble. While Jim was getting down in two on the next hole, Saul was over the green again and back for a par three.

The third hole was shared in birdies, the fourth in pars, the fifth in birdies again. Then Jim eagled the par-5 sixth, and Saul played back and forth across the green for a 5.

Four strokes, Jim thought, and cast a glance at Hatcher whose face was worried and confused. Maybe now he was having doubts about his perfect machine.

BUT Saul matched pars with Jim on the next two, then got back a stroke on the ninth with a long putt while Jim was scrambling for a par.

Jim took a long breath as they walked to the tenth tee to begin the second nine, the crucial nine. He had come in with a scorching 30, while Saul had shot his worst nine of the tournament, a 33, If Jim hadn't been terrific, he wouldn't have picked up a stroke. It was going to be tough to keep up that pace.

When Alice lit his cigarette for him, her hand was shaking. He held the hand firmly and looked steadily into her eyes. In a moment the shaking stopped. "Thanks," she said.

"Nothing to it," Jim said, and hoped he sounded more confident than he felt.

Jim breathed a little easier when Saul's two-iron bounced far down the back edge of the tenth green. Jim played it carefully, landing on the front edge and sticking. Saul took a long recovery shot and two putts for his

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first bogey. Jim's two putts gave him a par. He was only two strokes behind.

They shared birdies on the eleventh and pars on twelfth. On the next, however, Jim got his second eagle, with a chip shot that dribbled to the lip, trembled and finally dropped. Unperturbed, Saul holed his putt for a birdie.

One stroke behind? Jim muttered hoarsely to himself. The strain was beginning to tell. He had to steel himself before each shot to keep from trembling.

They each took pars on 14, birdie threes on 15. On the short sixteenth, Jim's 7-iron dropped 10 feet in front of the pin, Saul's 11 feet behind. Saul's putt was straight in.

Jim's hand shook as he lined up the putt. If he missed this, he would be two strokes behind again with only two holes to go. He could never hope to catch up. He jabbed at the ball. It trickled off to the right, stopping a full foot from the hole. He steadied himself and dropped the next.

For a moment, he could feel the old, familiar sense of despair and rage creep through him. Then Alice put her arm confidently through his as they walked to the seventeenth tee. Fiercely, Jim drove his longest wood of the day. It still lacked 30 yards of Saul's.

Saul overshot the green by 40 yards and ended with a par-five. Jim calmed himself to make a 50-foot approach putt stop within 3 feet of the pin, but left himself a sharp downhill slope. He tapped the second one gingerly. The ball trickled to the lip and dropped with a cheerful thunk.

He was no Tod Winters, Jim told himself wryly, but he had his moments. Once more he was only one stroke behind. One stroke, and one hole to go. Pick up a stroke and tie, two strokes and win. Win Alice or lose her. It was like losing the world. A tie would be no good. There were excellent reasons why Saul's game wouldn't be off on the morrow. He had to get two strokes on this hole, somehow.

JIM'S drive sliced behind a fringe of trees that divided the first and eighteenth fairways. Saul's drive, as usual, was long and straight. Jim wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was pain not to relax, not to quit, scream and curse.

The green was hidden, 130-yards away. He had to shoot over the trees blind. He swung easily, smoothly. The ball cleared the trees and dropped from sight. He barely heard the smattering of applause.

Jim watched Saul's approach land over the crowd at the back

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of the green. Jim walked up slowly. When he had forced his way through the spectators, he saw that his ball had landed on the green—but 25 feet from the cup.

The crowd formed a lane for Saul's third shot. It hit the green and scooted, coming to rest on the front edge. His putt was straight for the hole all the way. The hush broke into a moan. The ball had rimmed.

Jim figured it up. That would give Saul a five. He could win with a three. He studied the green carefully, noting the slopes, the lay of the grass. After a minute he decided on his line. He took his stance. Once more, an unnatural silence settled over the crowd.

Jim stroked the ball. It ran swiftly at first, then slowing, trickling over the last slope, nearing the cup, gently turning. Eternities passed, and the ball hesitated on the lip, toppled, disappeared.

The scene was bedlam. Alice grabbed his arm with one hand, thrust the score-card in front of his nose and jumped up and down screaming happily. Jim steadied the card long enough to read the score. Another 30—a 60 for the day. A 72-hole total of 255. A flock of broken records.

When the new U.S. Open champion walked to Saul's caddy and removed the ball from the boy's fingers, Hatcher was at his side. He was frowning.

"How did you do it?" he shouted.

Hatcher had ceased to awe Jim. Hatcher was not infallible.

"Under certain, extremely restricted sets of circumstances," Jim said, "a machine is better than a man. But, over the long run, over the gamut of situations, a machine doesn't have a chance. It just can't compete."

Hatcher was still frowning. "I still don't understand."

"Here," Jim said, handing him the golf ball Saul had been using.

Hatcher stared at it. "This isn't Saul's regular ball."

"That's right." Jim laughed. "It's a new one, guaranteed to add twenty yards to the average drive."

Slow understanding crossed Hatcher's face. "But that's unfair," he said. "That's . . ." He began to smile, and the smile broke into a chuckle. "I'll be damned!" he said.

"There are no perfect golfers," Jim said. "There are only good ones and better ones. I'll be around in a few days to talk about men and machines—and competition. I have $50,000 to invest in our new business—making robots—*useful* robots."

—JAMES E. GUNN

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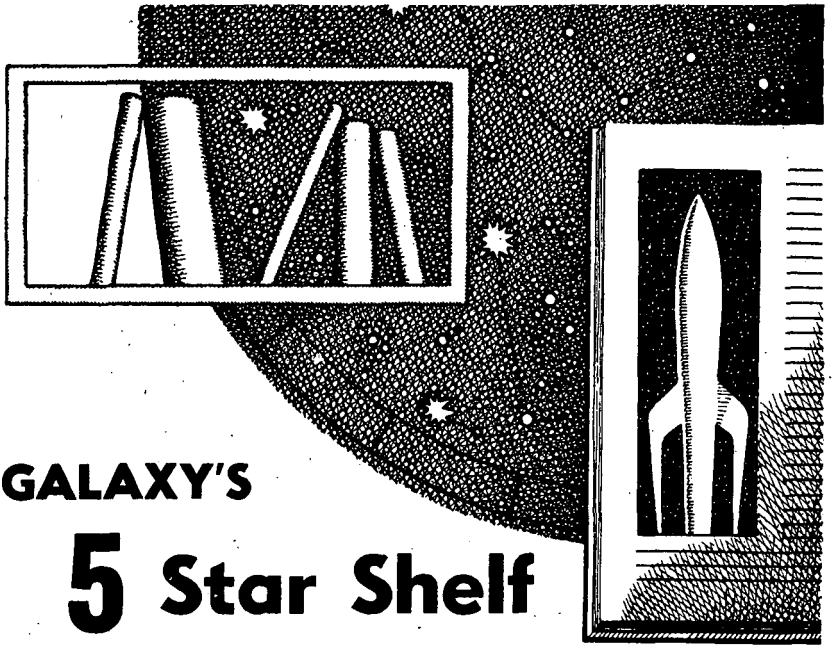

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

MUTANT by Lewis Padgett. Gnome Press, 1953, $2.75.

PADGETT'S "Baldy" series—four from 1945 and one from 1953 *Astounding* — is among the most mature, imaginative and moving pictures of a post-atomic-war world written. The tales tell of the struggles of a group of hairless telepathic mutants to find a way of survival for themselves and for the remnants of non-telepathic humanity against the onslaughts of some paranoid telepaths who want to subjugate "normal" humans and then would become *homo superior.*

Few have so vividly imagined what it might be like to be a telepath among telepaths, or how difficult it would be for a minority of them to co-exist with a large population of suspicious non-telepaths.

The book leaves one with a very poignant realization of the humanity of Man and the difficulties under which he must labor to become a truly rational being.

SCIENCE FICTION HANDBOOK by L. Sprague de Camp. Hermitage House, 1953, $3.50.

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THIS is the book for anyone who wants to learn how to write—and sell—science fiction and fantasy. The author presents everything from an informative short history of imaginative fiction, through a survey of science fiction markets and some brief biographies of leading s-f writers, to a series of chapters on how to think up ideas and how to plot, write and sell science fiction and fantasy. There is a final chapter on the pains and pleasures of being a writer of imaginative fiction.

Recommended even for people who *don't* want to write; it's fascinating reading for anyone who is interested in the creative process and how to make a living by it.

THE GREEN MILLENIUM by Fritz Leiber. Abelard Press, 1953, $2.75.

I CAN only report that I found this original novel creepily fantastic (an odd word to use in connection with science fiction, perhaps?), though very readable.

It tells of another world of tomorrow in which government and crime are allied and the people, frenetic, aimless and desperately degenerate, are primarily titivated and kept happy by phony sex entertainment.

Enter a green cat (and some other odd individuals) from outer space. The cat has the ability to make everybody around him happy, by means of a sort of hormonal discharge from his tongue. Both government and criminals consider the cat a threat to their power and try to get control of it in rather excessively bloody ways; but in the end everything comes out all right.

CONQUEST OF THE MOON by Wernher von Braun, Fred L. Whipple, and Willy Ley. Viking Press, 1953, $4.50 . . . *FLIGHT INTO SPACE by Jonathan Norton Leonard. Random House,* 1953, $3.50 . . . *THE COMPLETE BOOK OF OUTER SPACE, edited by Jeffrey Logan. Gnome Press,* 1953, $2.50 . . . *THE FIRST BOOK OF SPACE TRAVEL by Jeanne Bendick. Franklin Watts, Inc.,* 1953, $1.75.

NO doubt about it, space travel is the coming thing—in best sellers, anyhow, as the flood of new popularizations indicates.

The Viking book, with its 12 magnificent color plates by Bonestell, Klep and Freeman, is just as beautiful, authoritative and exciting as its predecessor, *Across the Space Frontier,* which came out last year. Designed for aficionados, it is a breath-taking bargain in every way.

Mr. Leonard's volume is excellent for the uninformed though

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sophisticated audience, and also has much for the already indoctrinated among us, particularly in its description of the enormous difficulties still to be overcome before space flight can be achieved. His discussion of the possibilities of life on other planets in our and other solar systems in judicious, and the whole book deserves praise for its clarity.

The Gnome book is a fascinating collection of pictures of varying value, plus text (of equally varying value) by everybody from Willy Ley to Hugo Gernsback. It's a weird miscellany (there are even chapters on Flying Saucers and on the science in science fiction), but generally an exciting one.

Miss Bendick's book, for children from 7 to 10, is first rate in every way, even scientifically. It was checked by Dr. Hugh Rice, of the Hayden Planetarium in New York. Delightfully illustrated with drawings by the author.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION, VOL. 2. Edited by Frederik Pohl. Ballantine Books, 1954, $2.00 *cloth,* .35c *paper.*

THE second Pohl collection of never-before-published science fantasies contains 14 items, of which three (Bester, Sturgeon, Sheckley) are superb; six (Clement, Bixby, del Rey, Boucher, Kornbluth, and a new writer by the name of Robert Crane) are very good, and five range from acceptable to poor, with only one rating the latter score.

The book is not quite up to the first in the series, though, perhaps because of the monotonous tone of gloom in most of the tales. Except for the items by Sturgeon, Clement, Boucher, and a charming though minor sketch by Fletcher Pratt, everything in the volume is hag-ridden. Nevertheless, definitely worth 35c!

STARMAN JONES by Robert A. Heinlein. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, $2.50.

THEORETICALLY, this is a juvenile. But a juvenile by Bob Heinlein — especially this one — is better than much of the so-called adult science fiction novels of these days. Make no mistake, this is not kid stuff: it is a richly textured and thoroughly mature tale of travel between the stars.

All the people in the book are wholly human, with all the faults and frailties that make humans, except for the fact that Jones, the young hero, has a pretty fancy eidetic memory which sets him above ordinary folk. But this also makes the story what it is, a thrilling narration of the fortuitous climb of a farmer's son to

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the rank of temporary captain of an interstellar liner. Without his abilities, he never would have made it.

I would say that this is the best of Heinlein's juveniles, of which there are now seven.

LUCKY STARR AND THE PIRATES OF THE ASTEROIDS by Paul French. Doubleday & Co., 1953, $2.50

HERE, on the other hand, is a boys' book that is All Boy. Not that adults won't enjoy it, too, but it is almost entirely conceived in the straight gee-whizz adventure technique that is the classical pattern for teen-age action stories.

The story tells how young David ("Lucky") Starr manages to frustrate the attempts of the Sirians to establish themselves secretly in the Asteroid Belt in our own solar system, so that they eventually could conquer us. It will give young people a lot of very lively daydreams — but no nightmares, not being as cruel and bloody as Paul (Isaac Asimov) French's first one, *David Starr, Space Ranger,* was. Excellent for the Junior Set.

EXPEDITION TO EARTH by Arthur C. Clarke. Ballantine Books, 1953. $2.00 *cloth,* 35c *paper*

ARTHUR CLARKE'S second Ballantine book in five months is a collection of 11 of his short stories. Although five have already been anthologized elsewhere, it still is a pleasure to have a bunch of high-grade Clarke all in one place.

The stories are continuously fascinating, from the beautiful and imaginative "Second Dawn" that opens the collection to the shockingly tragic "Breaking Strain" (previously anthologized as "Thirty Seconds — Thirty Days"). They cover most of the major types of modern science fantasy, too, thus exhibiting their author's versatility.

LOOKING FORWARD, edited by Milton Lesser. Beechhurst Press, 1953, $4.95

THIS most expensive of all science fiction anthologies yet published contains 20 stories, of which 7 have already appeared in other collections.

Of the previously anthologized stories, I liked those by Leinster, Bradbury (it's "The Fire Balloons," though called "In This Sign" here), Asimov, Anderson and del Rey; of the unanthologized ones, Chad Oliver, Stephen Marlowe and a curious, badly written and plotted story by Don Wilcox which nevertheless has a historic importance since it pre-

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dates both Heinlein's famed "Universe" and van Vogt's equally renowned "Far Centaurus" in its science fiction ideas.

The rest of the stories range from run-of-the-mill all down the way to terrible.

COSTIGAN'S NEEDLE by Jerry Sohl. Rinehart & Co., 1953, $2.50

SOHL'S third fantasy is considerably better than his first two. The first half, describing the making of a device through which people can pass to a parallel world, is exciting and quite vivid; but the latter half, when a group of humans set about establishing a society in that world, is somewhat unsatisfactory. The point (or moral) of the tale is more impressive and moving than its telling, and you may find it worth while reading it just to get that point.

BRIEF NOTES: Certainly the most distinguished book of short stories of 1953 was Roald Dahl's *Someone Like You* (Knopf, $3.50), which contained, among other marvels, "The Sound Machine," a famous piece of semi-science fiction from the anti-science fiction *New Yorker,* and an awe-inspiring fantasy-satire called "The Great Automatic Grammatisator" — an unforgettable bit of biting nonsense.

There is also "The Skin," a hair-curling slice of macabre, and many other goodies, not all science fiction or fantasy, but all superb.

It is good to see the novels of A. Merritt in clothbound editions again. Liveright is doing them two to a big fat volume, at only $2.75 each. The first contains *Seven Footprints to Satan* and *Burn Witch Burn!* and the second one *Dwellers in the Mirage* and *The Face in the Abyss.* Let's hope the rest are reissued the same way.

Don't miss Alfred (*Demolished Man*) Bester's savage picture of television production in his non-s-f "*Who He?*" (Dial, $3.50). It scarifies the Madison Avenue crowd in New York that is responsible for all that TV nonsense.

Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife* now available separately in cloth (Twayne, $2.75) and paper (Lion Books, 25c).

A. E. van Vogt's "The Shadow Men" (*Startling Stories,* 1950) is now out under the title *Universe Makers,* coupled with *The World of Null-A* in an Ace Book paperback double at 35c. The former has been rewritten full of L. Ron Hubbard's "scientology" —but it's still good reading.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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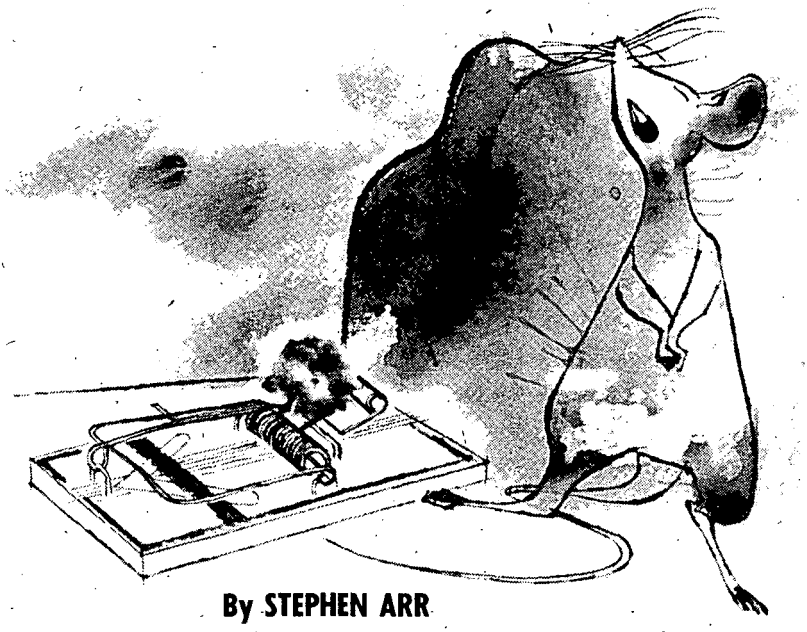
CHAIN OF COMMAND



By STEPHEN ARR

By going through channels, George worked up from the woodwork to the top brass!

Illustrated by ASHMAN

"GEORGE," Clara said with restrained fury, "the least you could do is ask him. Are you a mouse or a worm?"

"Well, I have gone out there and moved it every night," George protested, trying to reason with her without success.

"Yes, and every morning he puts it back. George, so long as that trap is outside of our front door, I can never have a moment's peace, worrying about the children. I won't go on like this! You must go out and talk some

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sense into him about removing it at once."

"I don't know," George said weakly. "They might not be happy to find out about us."

"Well, our being here is their own fault, remember that," Clara snorted. "They deliverately exposed your great-great grandfather Michael to hard radiations. George," she continued fervidly, "all you have to do is to go out and ask him. I'm sure he'll agree, and then we'll have this menace removed from our lives. I simply can *not* go on like this another minute!"

That, George knew, was a misstatement. She could go on like this for hours. He stared at her unhappily.

"Yes, dear," he mumbled finally. "Well, maybe tomorrow."

"No, George," she said firmly. "Now! This morning. The very moment he comes in."

He looked at her silently, feeling harried and unsure of himself. After living here so long, they'd observed and learned human customs and speech — they'd even adopted human names.

"George," she pleaded, "just ask him. Reason with him. Point out to him that he's just wasting his time. She paused, added, "You're intelligent — you can think of the right things to say."

"Oh, all right," he said wearily. But once he had said it, he felt better. At least, he would get it over with, one way or another.

AS soon as he heard the swish-swish of the broom outside his home, he got up and walked out of the front door. He saw that the trap was still off to one side, where he had pushed it the night before.

"Hello," he shouted.

Swish - swish - swish went the broom, busily moving dust from one part of the room to another, swish - swish - swish. The man looked tremendous from so close a view, yet George knew that he was just a little, bent, old man, a small specimen of the species.

George took a deep breath. "*Hello!*" he bellowed with all his strength.

The janitor stopped swish-swishing and looked around the room suspiciously.

"*Hello!*" George shrieked. His throat felt raw.

The janitor looked down and saw the mouse. "Hello yourself," he said. He was an ignorant old man and, when he saw the mouse shouting hello at him, he assumed right away that it was a mouse shouting hello to him.

"*The trap!*" the mouse bellowed.

"Stop *shouting!*" the janitor cried, annoyed. He liked to think as he worked, and he hated loud noises. "What about the trap?"

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"My wife doesn't want you to put it by the front door any more," George said, still speaking loudly, so that the janitor could hear, but at least not bellowing so that it tore his throat. "She's afraid it might hurt the children."

"*Will* it hurt the children?" the janitor demanded.

"No," George replied. "They know all about traps — but my wife still wants it removed."

"Sorry," the janitor said, "but my orders are to put a trap by every mousehole. This is an atomic plant, and they don't want mice."

"They do, too!" George said defiantly. "They brought my great - great - grandfather Michael here themselves and exposed him to hard radiations. Otherwise *I* wouldn't be here."

"I can't help it," the janitor snapped. "I have to obey orders."

"What will I tell my wife?" George shouted.

That stopped the janitor. He had a wife of his own.

"I guess I can take it up with the supervisor," he finally said.

"All right," George shouted. "*Thanks!*"

THE janitor picked up the trap and moved it over to the front door. He watched, interested, as George promptly pushed it several inches along the wall. Then he turned and busily swish-swished more dust around the room.

"Well, what did he say?" Clara asked George as soon as he came back into the house.

"Said he'd take it up with the supervisor," George said, settling down in an armchair.

"George," she ordered, "you get up this instant and make sure that he really does!"

"Look," George pleaded, "he said he would."

"He may have been lying," Clara said promptly. "You go right up to the supervisor's room and see."

So, George reluctantly heaved himself out of the chair and ran through the mouseways in the wall until he came to the mousehole in the supervisor's room.

At that moment, the janitor came in and the supervisor looked up, annoyed. He was a fat man, with stubble on his cheek, and he walked with a waddle.

"There's a mouse in room 112 who doesn't want a trap by his front door," the janitor said simply.

"You're crazy," the supervisor said.

The janitor shrugged. "What should I tell him?" he asked.

"Tell him to come up here and speak to me himself," the supervisor said, feeling very clever.

"I'm right here," George cried,

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stepping out of the mousehole and neatly side-stepping the mousetrap beside it.

"There he is now," the janitor said, pointing.

"My God!" whispered the supervisor, who'd had some education. "A hallucination."

"No, a mouse," the old janitor corrected.

"My wife wants the trap removed," George patiently explained. "She's worried the children might blunder into it."

"Do *you* see him, too?" the supervisor asked the janitor incredulously, still whispering.

"Sure," the janitor replied. "He's the one I was telling you about, from room 112."

The supervisor stood up unsteadily. "I don't feel very well," he said in a weak voice. "I think that I'd better talk this over with the Administrative Officer. It's a policy matter."

"You come along, too," he said hastily to the janitor, who had turned to leave. "I'll need all the support I can get." He waddled out, followed by the janitor.

"*What should I tell my wife?*" George shouted, but they didn't answer, so he went down and told his wife that they were discussing it with the Administrative Officer. And, as anyone could have guessed, a short time later he pushed his head out of the mousehole in the Administrative Office.

HE was a bit late, just in time to see the door close on the supervisor and the janitor.

So he shouted, "*Hello!*" as loud as he could.

The Administrative Officer looked down and saw him right away. He was a thin pale man with tired eyes.

"Go away," he said spiritlessly, "I've just told two people that you don't exist."

"But my wife wants that trap removed — it's dangerous for the children," George complained.

The Administrative Officer almost shouted to hell with George's children, but basically he was a decent man, even if an overworked one, and he caught himself in time.

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely, picking up some letters that he had already read, "but we've got to leave the traps."

"Then what will I tell my wife?" George demanded.

That stopped the Administrative Officer, too. He buried his head in his hands and thought for a long moment. "Are you sure you *really* exist?" he asked, finally raising his head from his hands.

"Sure," George said. "Do you want me to bite you to prove it?"

"No, you needn't bother," the Administrative Officer said. And

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then he buried his head in his hands again.

"Technically," he said, speaking through his fingers, "it's a security problem."

With an air of relief, he picked up the phone and called the Security Officer. There was a bit of spirited conversation and then he hung up.

"He'll be right down," the Administrative Officer told George.

Shortly thereafter, the door violently swung open, and a tall man with piercing eyes entered. "Hello Bill," he said quickly. "How are you feeling?"

"Hello, Mike," the Administrative Officer replied. "I feel like hell. This is George. I just called you about him."

"Hello!" George shouted.

"Hello!" the Security Officer shouted back. "I couldn't find any record of you in the files. Have you been cleared?" he added with a note of urgency in his voice. "Fingerprints, A. E. C., C. C. C., C. A. I., F. B. I.?"

"No!" George shouted back. "My wife wants the trap by our front door removed. She thinks it's dangerous for the children."

"Has *she* been cleared?" the Security Office countered in a loud voice.

"Why is everybody shouting?" the Administrative Officer asked peevishly. "I've got a headache."

"No," George answered.

THE Security Officer's mouth tightened into a thin, grim line. "A major lapse of security," he snapped. "I'll check into this very thoroughly."

"Will you remove the trap?" George asked.

"I can't, until you're cleared," the Security Officer said, shaking his head. "I certainly won't authorize any action that could be later construed as aiding the entrance of spies or subversives into the plant."

"How old are you?" the Administrative Officer asked George.

"Fifty-six days," George replied without hesitation.

"Under twelve years," the Administrative Officer pointed out to the Security Officer. "No clearance required."

"I don't know," the Security Officer said, shaking his head. "There's no precedent for a case like this. I'll be damned if I'll stick my neck out and have that trap removed. I know, I'll send a request for an advisory opinion." He turned and walked toward the door.

"What should I tell my wife?" George called after him.

"Tell her that I'm asking the A.E.C. for an opinion, with carbon copies to the Defense Dept. and the F.B.I."

"Don't forget Immigration & Naturalization," the Administrative Officer said. "There might be

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a question of citizenship."

"The hell there is," George said. "*Lex locis* — I was born here."

"Well," the Security Officer said as he walked out, "one can't be too careful."

So, George went and told his wife and, the next morning, he was on the train for Washington. Being telepathic, as all this generation of mice were, he already had contacted some mice who had an 'in' in the government buildings.

All the way down on the train, he worried about chasing all those carbons in the bureaucratic maze of Washington, but he needn't have.

As soon as the Security Officer's report was received, the A.E.C. sent a battery of psychiatrists to the plant. After the psychiatrists reported, they, in turn, were sent to another battery of psychiatrists. After that, the A.E.C. called a top-level conference of the Defense Dept., F.B.I. (Dept. Just.), Fish & Wildlife (Dept. Int.), Public Health (Dept. Welf.), Immigration & Naturalization and Alaskan Affairs. The latter turned out to be a mistake.

THIS had taken two weeks, and George had lingered in the walls, impatiently waiting for his chance to testify. Of course, he was in telepathic communication with Clara. He knew that his family were all well, that Clara had made friends with the janitor, also that the trap was still there.

The janitor no longer put cheese in it, and he didn't set the spring any more, but he still followed his orders and so, every morning, moved it back by the door of the little mousehouse.

A fat Washington mouse guided George to the mousehole in the conference room. George looked inside and sniffed the smoky air distastefully.

There were seven men seated at a long table, with a glass of water in front of each. This was a liquid that even George knew was hardly designed to lubricate the way to a quick agreement.

"*Bomb* them, I say," the General cried, smashing his fist down on the table. "Hit them hard with atomic weapons. Hit them *now*, before *they* have a chance to strike first."

"But that's one of our best plants," a civilian from the A.E.C. protested. "We don't want to blow it up, not for a few paltry mice."

"Couldn't we send them to Alaska?" the man from Alaskan Affairs asked timidly, wondering what he was doing there.

"How about traps?" the man from Fish and Wildlife said. "We have some honeys."

"But *that's just it!*" George

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said in a loud voice, and they all turned to look at him. "My wife would like that trap by our front door removed. She's afraid that it might hurt the children."

"*Who are you?*" the man from Immigration & Naturalization demanded sharply.

"I'm George," George said. "It's my house that has the trap in front of it."

"What are you doing *here?*" the man from the F.B.I. demanded. "Spying on a closed meeting!"

"I'm *not* spying!" George exclaimed. "I just came to ask you to please remove the trap."

THE man from the F.B.I. looked at him with something close to pity. "It's not that simple any more," he said. "Don't you realize what a threat you comprise?"

"No," George said, scampering up the leg of the table and walking to its center. "We're not a threat to anybody. We're just mice. It's not our nature to be a threat to anybody."

Then, as he looked around the table at the seven huge faces that surrounded him, he immediately saw that they were all scared half to death because he was a mouse, and he had a sudden premonition that he would not come out of the meeting alive. So he opened his mind to let his family and all the other telepathic mice hear everything that was happening.

"Don't tell me you don't fully realize," the Fish and Wildlife man demanded sarcastically, trying to hide his terror beneath a blustering tone, "that from one mouse, your great-great-grandfather Michael, there must be now at least twelve billion descendants—or six times the human population of Earth!"

"No, I didn't know," George said, interested despite himself.

"Don't tell me it never occurred to you," the man from the F.B.I. said, shaking a finger at him, while George could see that he kept the other hand on the revolver in his pocket, "that you mice have access to and could destroy every secret file we have!"

"No, it didn't," George said, shrinking from that huge, shaking finger. "We mice would never destroy anything uselessly."

"Or that you could cut the wires on any plane, tank, vehicle, train or ship, rendering it completely inoperable!" the General broke in, slamming a meaty palm down on the table so hard that George was thrown over on his back.

"Of course it never occurred to me!" George said, climbing rockily back on his feet. "We mice wouldn't think of such a thing. Don't be afraid," he pleaded, but

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it was no use. He could feel the panic in their breasts.

"Didn't you ever consider that you could cut every cable, telephone line, power line, and telegraph line from the States to Alaska?" the man from Alaskan Affairs said, just for the sake of saying something. Then, to show his bravery and defiance, he took his glass of water and emptied it on George. It was ice water, and poor George, dripping wet, began to tremble uncontrollably.

"I suppose you never considered that you could sabotage and blow up every atomic plant we have," the man from the A.E.C. said, before George even had a chance to answer Alaskan Affairs. And, working himself into a rage to overcome his fear, he emptied *his* glass of ice water on the trembling mouse.

GEORGE began to weep. "It *never* occurred to me," he sobbed. "We mice aren't like that."

"Nonsense!" the General said. "It's the unchanging law of nature. We must kill you or you will kill us. And we'll start by killing you!" The General roared louder than all the rest because he was the most frightened.

His hand, huge and terrible, swept swiftly down on poor, wet, weeping George. But the General really didn't know mouse tactics very well, because George was down the leg of the table and halfway to the mousehole before the huge hand struck the table with a noisy bang.

And poor George, frightened half out of his wits, scooted into the mousehole and ran and ran without stopping, through the mouseways as fast as he could, until he reached the train. But, of course, the train was no longer moving. All the telepathic mice had cut every cable, telephone line, power line and telegraph line, had also cut the wires on every plane, tank, vehicle, train and ship. They also had destroyed every file in the world.

So George had no alternative but to walk back to the plant, which had been preserved as a memorial to great - great - grandfather Michael.

IT took him three weary weeks to make it, and the first thing he noticed when he got there was the trap in front of the door. Naturally, there was no bait in it and the spring wasn't set, but the trap was still there.

"George," Clara said to him the moment after she kissed him, "you must speak to the janitor about the trap."

So George went outside right away, since he could hear the janitor swish-swashing the dust around.

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"*Hello!*" he shouted.

"Hello yourself," the janitor said. "So you're home again."

"My wife wants the trap moved," George said. "She's afraid the children might get hurt."

"Sorry," the janitor replied. "My orders were to put a mousetrap by each mousehole."

"How come you didn't go away with all the other people?" George shouted up at him.

"Stop shouting," the janitor said. Then, "I'm too old to change," he added. "Besides, I have a farm down the road."

"But haven't they stopped paying you?" George demanded.

"What's the difference," the janitor countered, "money can't buy anything any more."

"Well, what will I tell my wife about the trap?" George asked.

The janitor scratched his head. "You might tell her that I'll take it up with the supervisor, if he ever comes back."

So George went inside and told Clara.

"George," she said, stamping her foot, "I can't go on with that trap out there! You know that supervisor won't come back, so you've got to go out and find him."

George, who knew that there weren't many people around anywhere any more, walked over to his favorite easy chair and sat down. "Clara," he said, as he picked up a book, "you can leave or stay as you wish, but there is nothing more that I can do. I've wasted a full month over that trap without accomplishing a single thing, and I'm not going to start that business all over again."

—STEPHEN ARR

FORECAST

Remember GRAVY PLANET, that monumentally brilliant novel of a huckster Utopia, by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth? It was a truly great piece of science fiction . . . but just a warmup for their GLADIATOR AT LAW, which begins next month and runs for three vivid issues . . . though *sweeps* and *explodes* and *flares* are more accurate descriptions of its pace. Tell you a bit about it? That's like trying to fire a gun a little at a time. You'll have to explore this exciting serial's glittering and spectacularly sumptuous bubble cities and the ghastliness of Belly Rave (which we promise will be a part of your vocabulary) on your own. And bring your dark glasses and sedatives; you'll need them!

Back after much too long an absence, William Tenn takes you DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN, a novelet that combines an astonishing literary technique with a sensational theme. Nathan Hale, you recall, had but one life to give for his country—but that was before Tenn's technicians got to work!

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BEDSIDE MANNER

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Broken, helpless, she had to trust an alien doctor to give her back her body and mind—a doctor who had never seen a human before!

Illustrated by VIDMER

SHE awoke, and didn't even wonder where she was.

First there were feelings—a feeling of existence, a sense of still being alive when she should be dead, an awareness of pain that made her body its playground.

After that, there came a thought. It was a simple thought, and her mind blurted it out before she could stop it: *Oh, God, now I won't even be plain any more. I'll be ugly.*

The thought sent a wave of panic coursing through her, but she was too tired to experience any emotion for long, and she soon drowsed off.

Later, the second time she awoke, she wondered where she was.

There was no way of telling. Around her all was black and quiet. The blackness was solid, the quiet absolute. She was aware of pain again—not sharp pain this time, but dull, spread throughout her body. Her legs

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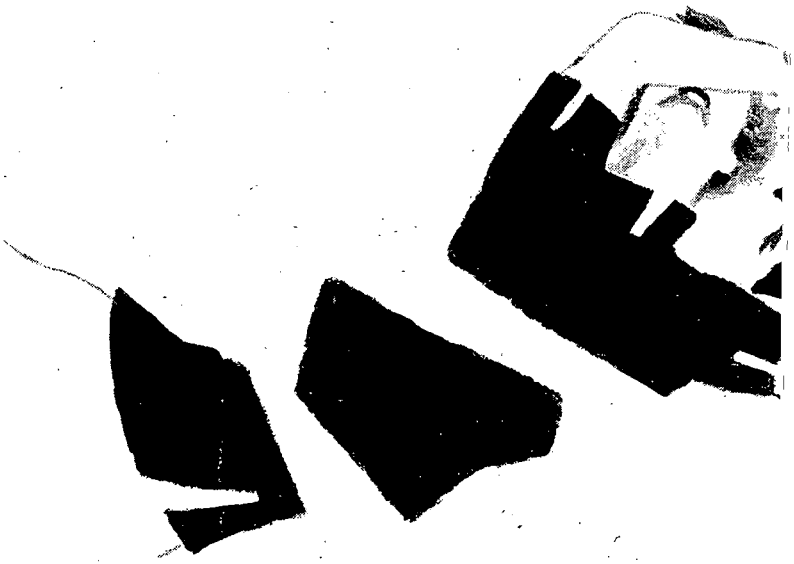

ached; so did her arms. She tried to lift them, and found to her surprise that they did not respond. She tried to flex her fingers, and failed.

She was paralyzed. She could not move a muscle of her body.

The silence was so complete that it was frightening. Not a whisper of sound reached her. She had been on a spaceship, but none of a ship's noises came to her now. Not the creak of an expanding joint, nor the occasional slap of metal on metal. Not the sound of Fred's voice, nor even the slow rhythm of her own breathing.

It took her a full minute to figure out why, and when she had done so she did not believe it. But the thought persisted, and soon she knew that it was true.

The silence was complete because she was deaf.

Another thought: The blackness was so deep because she was blind.

And still another, this time a questioning one: Why, if she could feel pain in her arms and legs, could she not move them? What strange form of paralysis was this?

She fought against the answer, but slowly, inescapably, it formed

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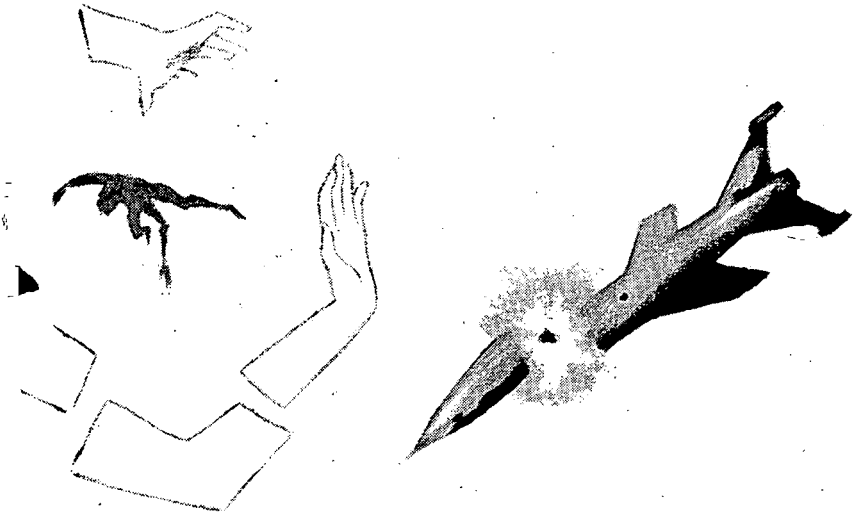

in her mind. She was not paralyzed at all. She could not move her arms and legs because she had none. The pains she felt were phantom pains, conveyed by the nerve endings without an external stimulus.

When this thought penetrated, she fainted. Her mind sought in unconsciousness to get as close to death as it could.

WHEN she awoke, it was against her will. She sought desperately to close her mind against thought and feeling, just as her eyes and ears were already closed.

But thoughts crept in despite her. Why was she alive? Why hadn't she died in the crash?

Fred must certainly have been killed. The asteroid had come into view suddenly; there had been no chance of avoiding it. It had been a miracle that she herself had escaped, if escape it could be called—a mere sightless, armless and legless torso, with no means of communication with the outside world, she was more dead than alive. And she could not believe that the miracle had been repeated with Fred.

It was better that way. Fred wouldn't have to look at her and

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shudder—and he wouldn't have to worry about himself, either. He had always been a handsome man, and it would have killed him a second time to find himself maimed and horrible.

She must find a way to join him, to kill herself. It would be difficult, no doubt, without arms or legs, without any way of knowing her surroundings; but sooner or later she would think of a way. She had heard somewhere of people strangling themselves by swallowing their own tongues, and the thought cheered her. She could at least try that right now. She could—

No, she couldn't. She hadn't realized it before, but she had no tongue.

She didn't black out at this sudden awareness of a new horror, although she desperately wanted to. She thought: *I can make an effort of will, I can force myself to die. Die, you fool, you helpless lump of flesh. Die and end your torture, die, die, die . . .*

But she didn't. And after a while, a new thought came to her: She and Fred had been the only ones on their ship; there had been no other ship near them. Who had kept her from dying? Who had taken her crushed body and stopped the flow of blood and tended her wounds and kept her alive? And for what purpose?

The silence gave no answer. Nor did her own mind.

After an age, she slept again.

When she awoke, a voice said, "Do you feel better?"

I *CAN hear!* she shouted to herself. *It's a strange voice, a most unusual accent. I couldn't possibly have imagined it. I'm not deaf! Maybe I'm not blind either! Maybe I just had a nightmare—*

"I know that you cannot answer. But do not fear. You will soon be able to speak again."

Who was it? Not a man's voice, nor a woman's. It was curiously hoarse, and yet clear enough. Uninflected, and yet pleasant. A doctor? Where could a doctor have come from?

"Your husband is also alive. Fortunately, we reached both of you at about the time death had just begun."

Fortunately? She felt a flash of rage. *You should have let us die. It would be bad enough to be alive by myself, a helpless cripple dependent upon others. But to know that Fred is alive too is worse. To know that he has a picture of me like this, ugly and horrifying, is more than I can stand. With any other man it would be bad enough, but with Fred it's unendurable. Give me back the ability to talk, and the first thing I'll ask of you is to kill me. I don't want to live.*

"It may reassure you to know

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that there will be no difficulty about recovering the use of the limbs proper to you, and the organs of sensation. It will take time, but there is no doubt about the final outcome."

What nonsense, she asked herself, was this? Doctors had done wonders in the creation and fitting of artificial arms and legs, but he seemed to be promising her the use of *real* limbs. And he had said, "organs of sensation." That didn't sound as if he meant that she'd see and hear electronically. It meant—

Nonsense. He was making a promise he couldn't keep. He was just saying that to make her feel better, the way doctors did. He was saying it to give her courage, keep her morale up, make her feel that it was worth fighting. But it *wasn't* worth fighting. She had no courage to keep up. She wanted only to die.

"Perhaps you have already realized that I am not what you would call human. However, I suggest that you do not worry too much about that. I shall have no difficulty in reconstructing you properly according to your own standards."

THEN the voice ceased, and she was left alone. It was just as well, she thought. He had said too much. And she couldn't answer, nor ask questions of her own . . . and she had so many.

He wasn't human? Then what was he? And how did he come to speak a human language? And what did he mean to do with her after he had reconstructed her? And what would she look like after she was reconstructed?

There were races, she knew, that had no sense of beauty. Or if they had one, it wasn't like a human sense of beauty. Would he consider her properly reconstructed if he gave her the right number of arms and legs, and artificial organs of sight that acted like eyes—and made her look like some creature out of Hell? Would he be proud of his handiwork, as human doctors had been known to be, when their patients ended up alive and helpless, their bodies scarred, their organs functioning feebly and imperfectly? Would he turn her into something that Fred would look at with abhorrence and disgust?

Fred had always been a little too sensitive to beauty in women. He had been able to pick and choose at his will, and until he had met her he had always chosen on the basis of looks alone. She had never understood why he had married her. Perhaps the fact that she was the one woman he knew who *wasn't* beautiful had made her stand out. Perhaps, too, she told herself, there was a touch of cruelty in his choice. He might

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have wanted someone who wasn't too sure of herself, someone he could count on under all circumstances. She remembered how people had used to stare at them—the handsome man and the plain woman—and then whisper among themselves, wondering openly how he had ever come to marry her. Fred had liked that; she was sure he had liked that.

He had obviously *wanted* a plain wife. Now he would have an ugly one. Would he want *that?*

She slept on her questions, and waked and slept repeatedly. And then, one day, she heard the voice again. And to her surprise, she found that she could answer back—slowly, uncertainly, at times painfully. But she could speak once more.

"We have been working on you," said the voice. "You are coming along nicely."

"Am I—am I—" she found difficulty asking: "How do I look?"

"Incomplete."

"I must be horrible."

A slight pause. "No. Not horrible at all. Not to me. Merely incomplete."

"My husband wouldn't think so."

"I do not know what your husband would think. Perhaps he is not used to seeing incomplete persons. He might even be horrified at the sight of himself."

"I—I hadn't thought of that. But he—we'll both be all right?"

"As a medical problem, you offer no insuperable difficulty. None at all."

"Why—why don't you give me eyes, if you can? Are you afraid—afraid that I might see you and find you—terrifying?"

AGAIN a pause. There was amusement in the reply. "I do not think so. No, that is not the reason."

"Then it's because—as you said about Fred—I might find myself horrifying?"

"That is part of the reason. Not the major part, however. You see, I am, in a way, experimenting. Do not be alarmed, please—I shall not turn you into a monster. I have too much knowledge of biology for that. But I am not too familiar with human beings. What I know I have learned mostly from your books, and I have found that in certain respects there are inaccuracies contained in them—I must go slowly until I can check what they say. I might mend certain organs, and then discover that they do not have the proper size or shape, or that they produce slightly altered hormones. I do not want to make such mistakes, and if I do make them, I wish to correct them before they can do harm."

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"There's no danger—?"

"None, I assure you. Internally and externally, you will be as before."

"Internally and externally. Will I—will I be able to have children?"

"Yes. We ourselves do not have your distinctions of sex, but we are familiar with them in many other races. We know how important you consider them. I am taking care to see that the proper glandular balance is maintained in both yourself and your husband."

"Thank you—Doctor. But I still don't understand—why don't you give me eyes right away?"

"I do not wish to give you eyes that see imperfectly, and then be forced to take them away. Nor do I want you to watch imperfect arms and legs developing. It would be an unnecessary ordeal. When I am sure that everything is as it should be, then I shall start your eyes."

"And my husband—"

"He will be reconstructed in the same way. He will be brought in to talk to you soon."

"And you don't want either of us to see the other in—in imperfect condition?"

"It would be inadvisable. I can assure you now that when I have completed your treatment you will almost exactly be as you were in the beginning. When that time comes, you will be able to use your eyes."

She was silent a moment.

He said, "Your husband had other questions. I am waiting to hear you ask them too."

"I'm sorry, Doctor . . . I wasn't listening. What did you say?"

HE repeated his remarks, and she said, "I do have other questions. But—no, I won't ask them yet. What did my husband want to know?"

"About me and my race. How we happened to find you in time to save you. *Why* we saved you. What we intend to do with you after you are reconstructed."

"Yes, I've wondered about those things too."

"I can give you only a partial answer. I hope you do not find it too unsatisfactory. My race, as you may have gathered, is somewhat more advanced than yours. We have had a head start," he added politely.

"If you can grow new arms and legs and eyes," she said, "you must be thousands of years ahead of us."

"We can do many other things, of which there is no need to talk. All I need say now is that I am a physician attached to a scouting expedition. We have had previous contact with human beings, and have taken pains to avoid coming to their attention. We do not want

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to alarm or confuse them."

"But all the same, you rescued us."

"It was an emergency. We are not human, but we have, you might say, humanitarian feelings. We do not like to see creatures die, even inferior creatures—not that you are, of course," he added delicately. "Our ship happened to be only a few thousand miles away when it happened. We saw, and acted with great speed. Once you are whole again, we shall place you where you will be found by your own kind, and proceed on our way. By that time, our expedition will have been completed."

"When we are whole again—Doctor, will I be exactly the same as before?"

"In some ways, perhaps even better. I can assure you that all your organs will function perfectly."

"I don't mean that. I mean—will I look the same?"

She felt that there was astonishment in the pause. "Look the same? Does that matter?"

"Yes . . . oh, yes, it matters! It matters more than anything else."

He must have been regarding her as if she were crazy. Suddenly she was glad that she had no eyes to see his bewilderment. And his contempt, which, she was sure, must be there too.

He said slowly, "I didn't realize. But, of course, we don't know how you did look. How can we make you look the same?"

"I don't know. But you must! You must!" Her voice rose, and she felt the pain in her throat as the new muscles constricted.

"You are getting hysterical," he said. "Stop thinking about this."

"But I can't stop thinking about it. It's the only thing I *can* think of! I don't want to look any different from the way I did before!"

He said nothing, and suddenly she felt tired. A moment before she had been so excited, so upset; and now—merely tired and sleepy. She wanted to go to sleep and forget it all. *He must have given me a sedative,* she thought. *An injection? I didn't feel the prick of the needle, but maybe they don't use needles. Anyway, I'm glad he did. Because now I won't have to think, I won't be able to think—*

SHE slept. When she awoke again, she heard a new voice. A voice she couldn't place. It said, "Hello, Margaret. Where are you?"

"Who . . . Fred!"

"Margaret?"

"Y-yes."

"Your voice is different."

"So is yours. At first I couldn't

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think who was speaking to me!"

"It's strange it took us so long to realize that our voices would be different."

She said shakily, "We're more accustomed to thinking of how we look."

He was silent. His mind had been on the same thing.

"Your new voice isn't bad, Fred," she said after a moment. "I like it. It's a little deeper, a little more resonant. It will go well with your personality. The Doctor has done a good job."

"I'm trying to think whether I like yours. I don't know. I suppose I'm the kind of guy who likes best what he's used to."

"I know. That's why I didn't want him to change my looks."

Again silence.

She said, "Fred?"

"I'm still here."

"Have you talked to him about it?"

"He's talked to me. He's told me about your being worried."

"Don't you think it matters?"

"Yes, I suppose it does. He told me he could do a good technical job—leave us with regular features and unblemished skins."

"That isn't what I want," she said fiercely. "I don't want the kind of regular features that come out of physiology books. I want my own features. I don't care so much about the voice, but I want my own face back!"

"That's a lot to ask for. Hasn't he done enough for us?"

"No. Nothing counts unless I have that. Do—do you think that I'm being silly?"

"Well—"

"I don't want to be beautiful, because I know you don't want me to be."

He sounded amazed. "Whoever told you that?"

"Do you think that after living with you for two years, I don't know? If you had wanted a beautiful wife, you'd have married one. Instead, you chose me. You wanted to be the good-looking one of the family. You're vain, Fred. Don't try to deny it, because it would be no use. You're vain. Not that I mind it, but you are."

"Are you feeling all right, Margaret? You sound—overwrought."

"I'm not. I'm being very logical. If I were either ugly or beautiful, you'd hate me. If I were ugly, people would pity you, and you wouldn't be able to stand that. And if I were beautiful, they might forget about you. I'm just plain enough for them to wonder why you ever married anyone so ordinary. I'm just the kind of person to supply background for you."

AFTER a moment he said slowly, "I never knew you had ideas like that about me.

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They're silly ideas. I married you because I loved you."

"Maybe you did. But *why* did you love me?"

He said patiently, "Let's not go into that. The fact is, Margaret, that you're talking nonsense. I don't give a damn whether you're ugly or beautiful—well, no, that isn't strictly true. I do care—but looks aren't the most important thing. They have very little to do with the way I feel about you. I love you for the kind of person you are. Everything else is secondary."

"Please, Fred, don't lie to me. I want to be the same as before, because I know that's the way you want me. Isn't there some way to let the Doctor know what sort of appearance we made? You have—had—a good eye. Maybe you could describe us—"

"Be reasonable, Margaret. You ought to know that you can't tell anything from a description." His voice was almost pleading. "Let's leave well enough alone. I don't care if your features do come out of the pictures in a physiology textbook—"

"Fred!" she said excitedly. "That's it! Pictures! Remember that stereo shot we had taken just before we left Mars? It must be somewhere on the ship—"

"But the ship was crushed, darling. It's a total wreck."

"Not completely. If they could take *us* out alive, there must have been some unhurt portions left. Maybe the stereo is still there!"

"Margaret, you're asking the impossible. We don't know where the ship is. This group the Doctor is with is on a scouting expedition. The wreck of our ship may have been left far behind. They're not going to retrace their tracks just to find it."

"But it's the only way . . . the only way! There's nothing else—"

She broke down. If she had possessed eyes, she would have wept—but as it was, she could weep only internally.

They must have taken him away, for there was no answer to her tearless sobbing. And after a time, she felt suddenly that there was nothing to cry about. She felt, in fact, gay and cheerful—and the thought struck her: *The Doctor's given me another drug. He doesn't want me to cry. Very well, I won't. I'll think of things to make me happy, I'll bubble over with good spirits—*

Instead, she fell into a dreamless sleep.

WHEN she awoke again, she thought of the conversation with Fred, and the feeling of desperation returned. *I'll have to tell the Doctor all about it,* she thought. *I'll have to see what he can do. I know it's asking an*

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awful lot, but without it, all the rest he has done for me won't count. Better to be dead than be different from what I was.

But it wasn't necessary to tell the Doctor. Fred had spoken to him first.

So Fred admits it's important too. He won't be able to deny any longer that I judged him correctly.

The Doctor said, "What you are asking is impossible."

"Impossible? You won't even try?"

"My dear patient, the wrecked ship is hundreds of millions of miles behind us. The expedition has its appointed task. It cannot retrace its steps. It cannot waste time searching the emptiness of space for a stereo which may not even exist any longer."

"Yes, you're right . . . I'm sorry I asked, Doctor."

He read either her mind or the hopelessness in her voice. He said, "Do not make any rash plans. You cannot carry them out, you know."

"I'll find a way. Sooner or later I'll find a way to do something to myself."

"You are being very foolish. I cannot cease to marvel at how foolish you are. Are many human beings like you, psychologically?"

"I don't know, Doctor. I don't care. I know only what's important to me!"

"But to make such a fuss about the merest trifle! The difference in appearance between one human being and another of the same sex, so far as we can see, is insignificant. You must learn to regard it in its true light."

"You think it's insignificant because you don't know anything about men and women. To Fred and me, it's the difference between life and death."

He said in exasperation, "You are a race of children. But sometimes even a child must be humored. I shall see what I can do."

But what could he do? she asked herself. The ship was a derelict in space, and in it, floating between the stars, was the stereo he wouldn't make an attempt to find. Would he try to get a description from Fred? Even the best human artist couldn't produce much of a likeness from a mere verbal description. What could someone like the Doctor do—someone to whom all men looked alike, and all women?

AS she lay there, thinking and wondering, she had only the vaguest idea of the passage of time. But slowly, as what must have been day followed day, she became aware of strange tingling sensations all over her body. The pains she had felt at first had slowly diminished and then van-

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ished altogether. What she felt now was not pain at all. It was even mildly pleasant, as if some one were gently massaging her body, stretching her muscles, tugging at her—

Suddenly she realized what it was: New limbs were growing. Her internal organs must have developed properly, and now the Doctor had gone ahead with the rest of his treatment.

With the realization, tears began to roll down her cheeks. *Tears,* she thought, *real tears—I can feel them. I'm getting arms and legs, and I can shed tears. But I still have no eyes.*

But maybe they're growing in . . . From time to time I seem to see flashes of light. Maybe he's making them develop slowly, and he put the tear ducts in order first. I'll have to tell him that my eyes must be blue. Maybe I never was beautiful, but I always had pretty eyes. I don't want any different color. They wouldn't go with my face.

The next time the Doctor spoke to her, she told him.

"You may have your way," he said good-naturedly, as if humoring a child.

"And, Doctor, about finding the ship again—"

"Out of the question, as I told you. However, it will not be necessary." He paused, as if savoring what he had to tell her. "I checked with our records department. As might have been expected, they searched your shattered ship thoroughly, in the hope of finding information that might contribute to our understanding of your race. They have the stereos, about a dozen of them."

"A *dozen* stereos? But I thought—"

"In your excitement, you may have forgotten that there were more than one. All of them seem to be of yourself and your husband. However, they were obviously taken under a wide variety of conditions, and with a wide variety of equipment, for there are certain minor differences between them which even I, with my non-human vision, can detect. Perhaps you can tell us which one you prefer us to use as a model."

She said slowly, "I had better talk about that with my husband. Can you have him brought in here, Doctor?"

"Of course."

SHE lay there, thinking. A dozen stereos. And there was still only one that she remembered. Only a single one. They had posed for others, during the honeymoon and shortly after, but those had been left at home on Mars before they started on their trip.

Fred's new voice said, "How are

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you feeling, dear?"

"Strange. I seem to have new limbs growing in."

"So do I. Guess we'll be our old selves pretty soon."

"Will we?"

She could imagine his forehead wrinkling at the intonation of her voice. "What do you mean, Margaret?"

"Hasn't the Doctor told you? They have the stereos they found on our ship. Now they can model our new faces after our old."

"That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"But what do *you* want, Fred? I remember only a single one, and the Doctor says they found a dozen. And he says that my face differs from shot to shot."

Fred was silent.

"Are they as beautiful as all that, Fred?"

"You don't understand, Margaret."

"I understand only too well. I just want to know—were they taken before we were married or after?"

"Before, of course. I haven't gone out with another girl since our wedding."

"Thank you, dear." Her own new voice had venom in it, and she caught herself. *I musn't talk like that,* she thought. *I know Fred, I know his weakness. I knew them before I married him. I have to accept them and help him, not rant at him for them.*

He said, "They were just girls I knew casually. Good-looking, but nothing much otherwise. Not in a class with you."

"Don't apologize." This time her voice was calm, even amused. "You couldn't help attracting them. Why didn't you tell me that you kept their pictures?"

"I thought you'd be jealous."

"Perhaps I would have been, but I'd have got over it. Anyway, Fred, is there any one of them you liked particularly?"

HE became wary, she thought. His voice was expressionless as he said, "No. Why?"

"Oh, I thought that perhaps you'd want the Doctor to make me look like her."

"Don't be silly, Margaret! I don't want you to look like anybody but yourself. I don't want to see their empty faces ever again!"

"But I thought—"

"Tell the Doctor to keep the other stereos. Let him put them in one of his museums, with other dead things. They don't mean anything to me any more. They haven't meant anything for a long time. The only reason I didn't throw them away is because I forgot they were there and didn't think of it."

"All right, Fred. I'll tell him to use our picture as a model."

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"The AC studio shot. The close-up. Make sure he uses the right one."

"I'll see that there's no mistake."

"When I think I might have to look at one of *their* mugs for the rest of my life, I get a cold sweat. Don't take any chances, Margaret. It's your face I want to see, and no one else's."

"Yes, dear."

I'll be plain, she thought, *but I'll wear well. A background always wears well. Time can't hurt it much, because there's nothing there to hurt.*

There's one thing I overlooked, though. How old will we look? The Doctor is rather insensitive about human faces, and he might age us a bit. He mustn't do that. It'll be all right if he wants to make us a little younger, but not older. I'll have to warn him.

She warned him, and again he seemed rather amused at her.

"All right," he said, "you will appear slightly younger. Not too much so, however, for from my reading I judge it best for a human face to show not too great a discrepancy from the physiological age."

She breathed a sigh of relief. It was settled now, all settled. Everything would be as before—perhaps just a little better. She and Fred could go back to their married life with the knowledge that they would be as happy as ever. Nothing exuberant, of course, but as happy as their own peculiar natures permitted. As happy as a plain and worried wife and a handsome husband could ever be.

NOW that this had been decided, the days passed slowly. Her arms and legs grew, and her eyes too. She could feel the beginnings of fingers and toes, and on the sensitive optic nerve the flashes of light came with greater and greater frequency. There were slight pains from time to time, but they were pains she welcomed. They were the pains of growth, of return to normalcy.

And then came the day when the Doctor said, "You have recovered. In another day, as you measure time, I shall remove your bandages."

Tears welled up in her new eyes. "Doctor, I don't know how to thank you."

"No thanks are needed. I have only done my work."

"What will you do with us now?"

"There is an old freighter of your people which we have found abandoned and adrift. We have repaired it and stocked it with food taken from your own ship. You will awaken inside the freighter and be able to reach

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your own people."

"But won't I—can't I even get the chance to see you?"

"That would be inadvisable. We have some perhaps peculiar ideas about keeping our nature secret. That is why we shall take care that you carry away nothing that we ourselves have made."

"If I could only—well, even shake hands—do *something*—"

"I have no hands."

"No hands? But how could you—how can you—do such complicated things?"

"I may not answer. I am sorry to leave you in a state of bewilderment, but I have no choice. Now, please, no more questions about me. Do you wish to talk to your husband for a time before you sleep again?"

"Must I sleep? I feel so excited . . . I want to get out of bed, tear off my bandages, and see what I look like!"

"I take it that you are not anxious to speak to your husband yet."

"I want to see myself first!"

"You will have to wait. During your last sleep, your new muscles will be exercised, their tones and strength built up. You will receive a final medical examination. It is most important."

She started to protest once more, but he stopped her. "Try to be calm. I can control your feelings with drugs, but it is better that you control yourself. You will be able to give vent to your excitement later. And now I must leave you. You will not hear from me after this."

"Never again?"

"Never again. Goodbye."

For a moment she felt something cool and dry and rough laid very lightly against her forehead. She tried to reach for him, but could only twitch her new hands on her new wrists. She said, with a sob, "Goodbye, Doctor."

When she spoke again, there was no answer.

She slept.

THIS time, the awakening was different. Before she opened her eyes, she heard the creaking of the freighter, and a slight hum that might have come from the firing of the jets.

As she tried to sit up, her eyes flashed open, and she saw that she was lying in a bunk, strapped down to keep from being thrown out. Unsteadily, she began to loosen the straps. When they were half off, she stopped to stare at her hands. They were strong hands, well-shaped and supple, with a healthily tanned skin. She flexed them and unflexed them several times. Beautiful hands. The Doctor had done well by her.

She finished undoing the straps, and got to her feet. There was none of the dizziness she had ex-

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pected, none of the weakness that would have been normal after so long a stay in bed. She felt fine.

She examined herself, staring at her legs, body—staring as she might have done at a stranger's legs and body. She took a few steps forward and then back. Yes, he had done well by her. It was a graceful body, and it felt fine. Better than new.

But her face!

She whirled around to locate a mirror, and heard a voice: "Margaret!"

Fred was getting out of another bunk. Their eyes sought each other's faces, and for a long moment they stared in silence.

Fred said in a choked voice, "There must be a mirror in the captain's cabin. I've got to see myself."

At the mirror, their eyes shifted from one face to the other and back again. And the silence this time was longer, more painful.

A wonderful artist, the Doctor. For a creature—a person—who was insensitive to the differences in human faces, he could follow a pattern perfectly. Feature by feature, they were as before. Size and shape of forehead, dip of hairline, width of cheeks and height of cheekbones, shape and color of eyes, contour of nose and lips and chin—nothing in the two faces had been changed. Nothing at all.

Nothing, that is, but the overall effect. Nothing but the fact that where before she had been plain, now she was beautiful.

I should have realized the possibility, she thought. *Sometimes you see two sisters, or mother and daughter, with the same features, the faces as alike as if they had been cast from the same mold—and yet one is ugly and the other beautiful. Many artists can copy features, but few can copy with perfect exactness either beauty or ugliness. The Doctor slipped up a little. Despite my warning, he's done too well by me.*

And not well enough by Fred. Fred isn't handsome any more. Not ugly really—his face is stronger and more interesting than it was. But now I'm the good-looking one of the family. And he won't be able to take it. This is the end for us.

FRED was grinning at her. He said, "Wow, what a wife I've got! Just look at you! Do you mind if I drool a bit?"

She said uncertainly, "Fred, dear, I'm sorry."

"For what? For his giving you more than you bargained for—and me less? It's all in the family!"

"You don't have to pretend, Fred. I know how you feel."

"You don't know a thing. I *asked* him to make you beauti-

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ful. I wasn't sure he could, but I asked him anyway. And he said he'd try."

"You *asked* him—oh, no!"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Are you sorry? I hoped he'd do better for me, but—well, did you marry me for my looks?"

"You know better, Fred!"

"I didn't marry you for yours either. I told you that before, but you wouldn't believe me. Maybe now you will."

Her voice choked. "Perhaps—perhaps looks aren't so important after all. Perhaps I've been all wrong about everything. I used to think was essential."

"You have," agreed Fred. "But you've always had a sense of inferiority about your appearance. From now on, you'll have no reason for that. And maybe now we'll both be able to grow up a little."

She nodded. It gave her a strange feeling to have him put around her a pair of arms she had never before known, to have him kiss her with lips she had never before touched. *But that doesn't matter,* she thought. *The important thing is that whatever shape we take, we're* us. *The important thing is that now we don't have to worry about ourselves—and for that we have to thank* him.

"Fred," she said suddenly, her face against his chest. "Do you think a girl can be in love with two—two people—at the same time? And one of them—one of them not a man? Not even human?"

He nodded, but didn't say anything. And after a moment, she thought she knew why. *A man can love that way too,* she thought—*and one of them not a woman, either.*

I wonder if he . . . she . . . it knew. I wonder if it knew.

—WILLIAM MORRISON

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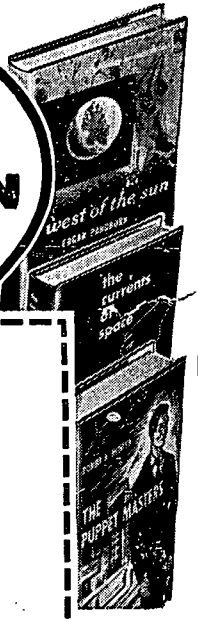

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